

PlayStation®

Official Magazine - UK



02>
9 771752 210009
ISSUE 002 FEBRUARY 2007 £4.99



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PlayStation®

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Welcome



Remember your first gaming experience? Was it watching the haunting underwater opening of Metal Gear Solid? Or downing your first giant in Shadow Of The Colossus? Whether you're new to gaming or have been playing for decades, one thing you'll know is that great games create great memories. But time is always moving on, and as PS3 approaches I've been trying to decide which games are going to be the future classics that burn themselves onto your mind for years to come. Does Resistance: Fall Of Man really have what it takes? Or is there an outsider; a less obvious game waiting to catch us all by surprise?

In no time at all, PS3 will be upon us, a new chapter will start and we'll be there, seeing it as it happens and discovering what the next generation has to offer. In the next 130 pages you could catch your first glimpse of the game you'll tell your kids about (well, you might), an experience that shapes PS3 and defines its place in history. You just don't know it yet. No one does.

In the meantime, have a look at the PS3 handbook that comes free with this magazine – it's our users guide to PS3 and tells you about all the brilliant things your next console can do. Games? That's only the start.

Tim Clark Editor

tim.clark@futurenet.co.uk

COVER FEATURE



60 RESISTANCE FALL OF MAN

BUGHUNT #1

Hostile alien species dissected, weakspots exposed, high explosive remedies recommended.

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FEATURE



74 LAUNCH DAY MADNESS

The day America did its nut for PS3.



BUGHUNT #2

86 BLACKSITE: AREA 51

America's favourite UFO parking lot is crawling with angry aliens again.

80 HONEY, WE NEED A PS3

Destroy all arguments against owning a PS3.





39 MERCENARIES II: WORLD IN FLAMES

Fire, oil, guns and hideous booby traps... this game ticks pretty much all our boxes.



THE BIG 10 STORIES

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Next issue on sale 07 February



PlayStation.
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Future Plc, 30 Monmouth Street,
Bath, BA1 2BW, United Kingdom
Telephone +44 (0) 1225 442244
Fax +44 (0) 1225 732275
futurenet.com

Editor in chief Mark Donald
Editor Tim Clark
Senior art editor Dylan Channon
Art editor Mark Wynne
Deputy art editor 'Gangsta' Al Wardle
Operations editor Helen Woodey
Games editor Ben Wilson
News editor Leon Hurley
Staff writer Rachel Weber

Contributors

Contributing writers Nathan Doherty, Lee Hall,
Jon Hamblin, Dave Harrison, Lee Hart,
Andrew Kelly, Simon Parkin, Louis Pattison,
Paul Roudell, Joel Snape, Keith Stuart
Contributing production Daniel Down,
Elizabeth Elliott, Paul Fitzpatrick
Contributing designers John McAllister,
Nick Mayle, Amit Patel, Terry Stokes, Anna Fisher,
Nicky Gotobed
Contributing photographer Philip Sowles
Contributing illustrators Andy McLaughlin,
Myles Talbot, Paul Tynell
Production co-ordinator Lee Thomas
Creative solutions Colin Fales
Production manager Rose Griffiths

Advertising Bath Office
01225 442244

Advertising director Jayne Cople
Head of divisional sales Scott Finchy, Longstaff
Senior ad manager Clair Reithly
Classified executive Craig Nutland

Advertising London Office
0208 3172800

Head of agency sales Poorna Smith

Management & Marketing

Group publishing director Simon Wear
Group publisher Mia Walter
Editorial director Jim Douglas
Design director Matthew Williams
Publisher Matthew Pierce
Group senior editor Mike Gelsborth
Group art director Ian Miller
Marketing product manager Stuart Bell
Marketing executive Kim Owens

Subscriptions

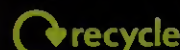
Future Publishing Ltd,
FREEPOST RLSC-SKXE-SKKT
Unit 4, Tower House, Sovereign Park,
Market Harborough, Leicestershire LE16 9EF
0870 837 4722 UK new orders and renewals
0870 837 4773 UK queries and back issues
+44 1859 438794 Overseas new orders and renewals

+44 1859 438795 Overseas queries and back issues
Distributed through the UK Newstrade by Marketforce
(UK) Ltd, 5th Floor, Low Rise Building, King Reach Tower,
Stamford Street, London SE1 9LS. 0207 633 3300
Overseas Distribution by Future Publishing Ltd
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Group finance director John Bowman
Tel +44 1225 442244 futureplc.com

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Official Magazine - UK

Who we are...



Tim Clark
Editor

Our inspirational leader took deadline week off to play PSP on a Caribbean beach. Mutiny pencilled in for next month.

Game of the moment Canis Canem Edit **Can't wait for** Resident Evil 5



Leon Hurley
News editor

Leon's head is bubbling with hard fact and hot opinion, which can be a problem when all we want is a simple 'yes', 'no' or 'do it yourself'.

Game of the moment Tony Hawk's Project 8 **Can't wait for** Assassin's Creed



Helen Woodey
Operations editor

Hels is the OPM team's all-action midfield dynamo. Wait, best make that all-action, heavily-pregnant, midfield dynamo.

Game of the moment Guitar Hero II **Can't wait for** Resistance: Fall Of Man



Ben Wilson
Games editor

Beneath Ben's sports casual exterior, a black lipstick-wearing alter-ego aches to get out. Each day we pray it doesn't.

Game of the moment Marvel: Ultimate Alliance **Can't wait for** Pro Evolution Soccer 7



Rachel Weber
Staff writer

Rachel's boundless enthusiasm is undercut by her 'thing' for mind-gnawing Japanese horror games. It's always the quiet ones.

Game of the moment Rule Of Rose **Can't wait for** The Overwhelming Hell



Paul Fitzpatrick
Writer

Fitzzy knows more about Metal Gear than any other man. And that includes Hideo Kojima, who's increasingly forgetful these days.

Game of the moment Scarface: The World Is Yours **Can't wait for** Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots

Something on your mind? Write to the team at opm@futurenet.co.uk

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The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about...

UK launch line-up

Our sources flame-grilled to reveal the 25 games you can buy for PS3 at UK launch.

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GTHD scrapped

GT in disarray as iTunes Turismo is swapped for a free download.

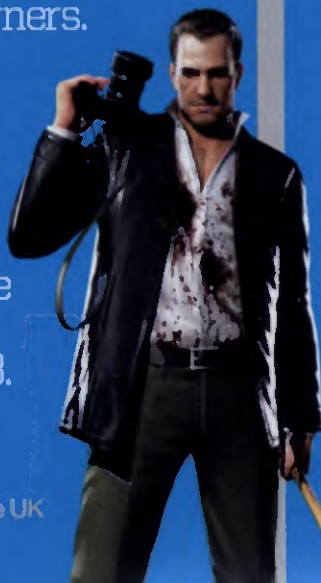
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PS3: home at last

Gaze jealously at pictures of PS3s and their proud American owners.

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Exclusives busted

Why no rival console game is safe from PlayStation 3.

► Page 18

1 UK on target for March PS3

It'll be here, but will there be enough?

With just two months to go until the UK PS3 launch, the big question is: will Sony still deliver our PS3s in March? Gamers are nervous that the big day could be pushed back after news emerged that Sony cut the US launch allocation in half to 200,000. Memories are also fresh of the Euro PSP launch, which slipped from March to September 2005. But a Sony spokesperson confirmed to OPM: "We're still committed to a March release for the UK and Europe, although we still have yet to confirm an exact date."

Major retailers are equally keen for Sony to confirm an exact launch date, and most privately believe that the day will be close to the end of March. The only thing anyone can say for sure is that you will have to pre-order. We asked Stephen Lynn, Virgin Megastore's marketing manager, if there was any other way: "I think if you ask any retailer, they will say no," says Lynn. "I'd love to be able to say yes, but there simply won't be enough units."

Pre-ordering is an essential part of retailers' plans to avoid the confusion and chaos of the US launch. "One of the things we've learnt from the Wii [launch] is that people want to know what's going on," explains Lynn. "We'll be collecting email addresses and

communicating with people constantly - 'sorry, this pre-order is shut, but we'll update you once we know when new stock is coming' for example." Amazon has a similar policy - sign-up for PS3 alerts and you'll receive a notification email as soon as the pre-order scheme opens.

Get in line

"We have the ability to keep customers who have pre-ordered updated as to when they can expect their order to be available for collection," says Anna Downing, senior product manager at Gamestation. "This avoids some of the more unsavoury scenes recently witnessed in America. Although it's very exciting for retailers and consumers alike to attend midnight openings, we certainly wouldn't jeopardise the safety of our customers."

No UK riots then, but that doesn't mean you can dawdle. "The Wii pre-order was open for just a week before we had to shut it, because we can only take orders if we know we have enough consoles to sell," says Lynn. PS3 numbers will be extremely limited in the UK at launch, so get yourself on a pre-order list as soon as possible.

PlayStation 3 is set for a March release in the UK and will cost £425 for the top spec 80GB model.



■ A victorious US gamer proudly clutches his PS3 – hopefully you won't need a deckchair in the UK.



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



Dante and Nero to fight it out over new girl

Devil May Cry 4's new star, Nero, is out to destroy the series' half-demon hero, Dante. But why? They may look like twins but new girl Kyrie has them at each other's throats. She has influence over Nero as they are both members of a demon-hunting bunch of monks called the Order of the Blade. The latest footage (capcom.co.jp/devil4/main.html) picks up the story and is an exhilarating display of DMC4's in-game engine power. Both male leads are playable and have unique powers – Nero's hellfire-wreathed arm is the best ability seen so far. But Dante is about to show he's still got a trick up his sleeve too...

Devil May Cry 4 is published by Capcom on PlayStation 3 and is due in late 2007.



1 In one move, Dante crashes through the ceiling and blows away the leader of the Order of the Blade, who also happens to be new girl Kyrie's brother.

2 DMC4's

Attack

The Order's monks are sword fighting specialists and attack Dante. Not specialist enough, though – he slices 'em like sashimi.



Who's the girl?
New character Kyrie is said to be an 'older-sister' figure to Nero, DMC4's troubled new boy. To our eyes she looks even more high-maintenance than previous arm-candy, Lucia and Lady.

4

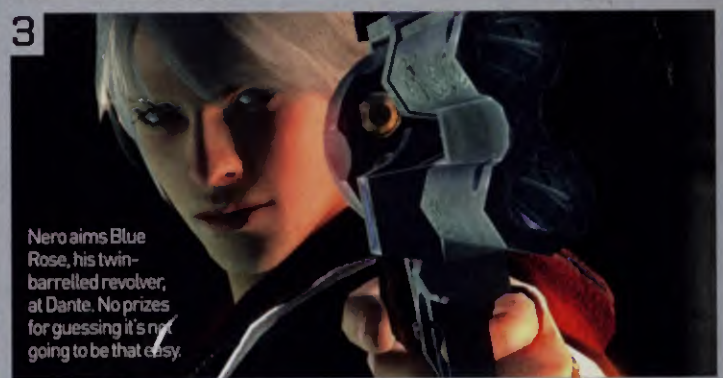


Head shot



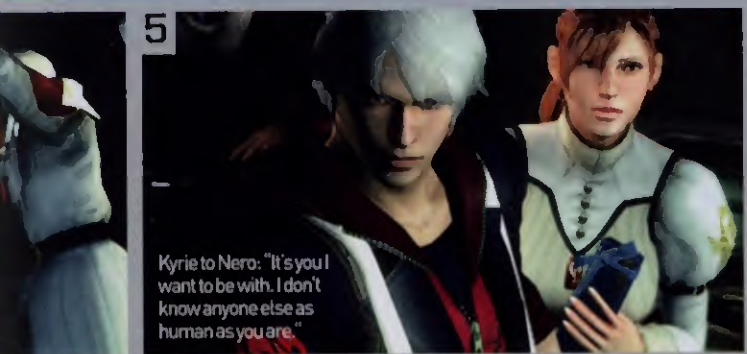
2 Kyrie is performing at the Order's Grand Ritual. Oblivious to the murder or just a consummate pro, the show goes on.

Pro



3 Nero aims Blue Rose, his twin-barrelled revolver, at Dante. No prizes for guessing it's not going to be that easy.

love triangle...

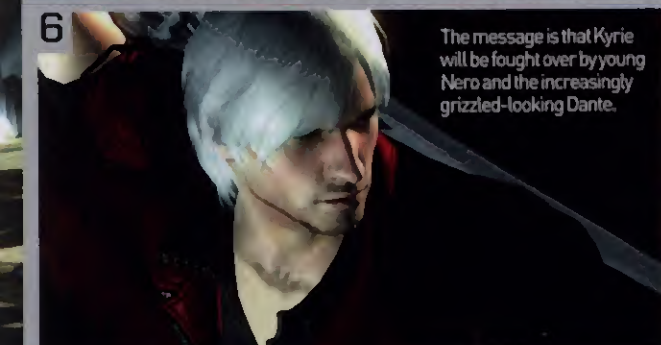


5 Kyrie to Nero: "It's you I want to be with. I don't know anyone else as human as you are."



7 The footage climaxes with the rivals duelling along the blade of an enormous stone sword. It looks sensational. Nero is to the left (blue coat) while Dante gets a close shave on the right (red coat).

Duel



6 The message is that Kyrie will be fought over by young Nero and the increasingly grizzled-looking Dante.



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

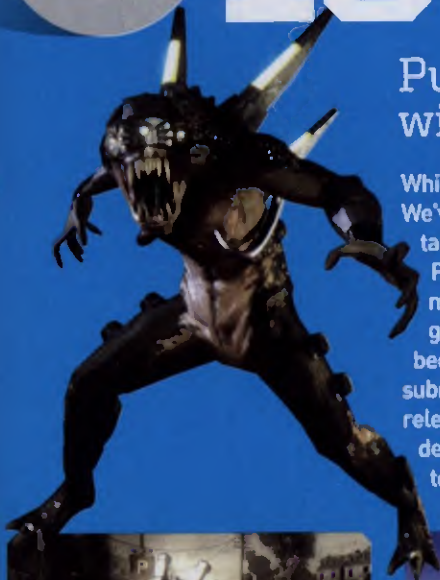
3

Is this the UK

Publishers reveal which games will arrive alongside PS3 in March

Which game will play on your brand new PS3 first? We've got your list of choices right here, give or take a few titles. The official Sony word on the PS3 launch line-up is due in a few weeks, but most publishers already know which of their games will be out day one in Europe. That's because completed PS3 games must be submitted to Sony for approval one month before release - and with the machine slated for March, developers are busy putting the finishing touches to their launch titles right now.

So we called every publisher to find out which games will make that February cut-off point, giving us a list of 25 near-definites. Sony will delay making an announcement for as long as possible because technical problems can always delay a game at the 11th hour. But a quick glance at this list confirms the depth and diversity of PS3's exciting line-up. It includes three shooters, six racers, and seven sports games, plus singing, skating, and beating enemies with bare fists and/or samurai swords. March can't come soon enough.



Resistance: Fall of Man

It took seven years for PS2 to deliver a must-have shooter in the shape of Black. PS3 will have one on its first day on sale as aliens go on the rampage in '50s-era Britain. Utterly essential.



Motorstorm

Physics has never been so much fun (promise) as monster trucks, Jeeps, ATVs, quad bikes and more can't around dirt-spattered, undulating tracks. Tremendous in multiplayer.



Ridge Racer 7

Namco's arcade racer returns with even more outrageous slides, sacrilegiously sexy 1080p visuals, an innovative online service, a brilliant boost system and... oh, just buy it.



Call of Duty 3

The grinding horror of WW2 warfare gets rammed home with a vengeance. This is one intense shooter that makes hand-to-hand combat even more personal with tilt control.



Need For Speed Carbon

Task your 'crew' with finding shortcuts or blocking rivals during races, as the monster-selling series heads out of the city and into the canyons. Also features a neat car-sculpting system.



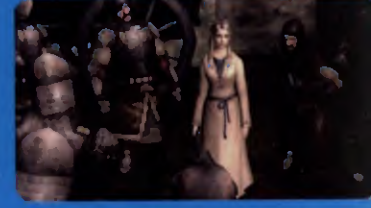
Tiger Woods 07

The Lord Of Nike's presence on PS3 is inevitable like Ryder Cup defeats for Uncle Sam. This outing improves the shot-aiming system and 'Universal Capture' tech means Tiger looks eerily real.



Formula One 06

Be Alonso, be Schumacher, be Button endlessly wondering "Why can't it be me?" Expect first class graphics, official liveries, deadly car damage, competitive AI and a newly pepped F1 experience.



Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War

The toasty French heroine Joan Of Arc is resuscitated for some real-time strategy set in the 14th Century. Don't all pre-order it at once.



Sonic The Hedgehog

Return of the fleabag beloved by primary-schoolers and men who should know better. Can Sonic finally crack 3D? Not if the terrible reviews of the Xbox 360 version are anything to go by...



Full Auto 2: Battlelines

Mad Max style guns and cars wreackathon. Cruise the post-apocalypse highways, strap a rocket launcher to your muscle car; don't pay the congestion charge.



World Snooker Championship 2007

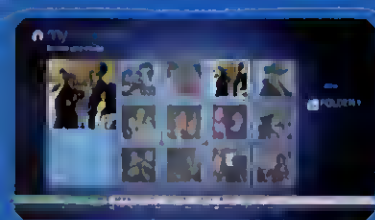
Okay, there's nothing technically wrong with this - a PS3 update of the solid PS2 version - but shouldn't we be asking for more than slightly shinier balls?



Marvel: Ultimate Alliance

Fugly looking but surprisingly solid action-RPG, with a huge roster of superheroes and villains, plus chunky (if repetitive) fighting and a clever branching mission structure to increase replayability.

launch line-up?



SingStar

Sing Bonnie Tyler through drunken tears, as Sony's genius karaoke game comes to PS3. You will be able to download songs from the PlayStation Store, so that's the launch-night party sorted, then.



Fight Night Round 3

"He ain't pretty no more!" Ironic, because the game looks stunning. The best boxing game bar none comes drenched in next-gen sweat and now features a dramatic first-person chin mode.



The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion

The current king of fantasy role-playing, thanks to a labyrinthine plot and vast world to explore. The PS3 version boasts a brand new guild and quest series.



Rainbow Six Vegas

Slot terrorists then play the slots as the counter-terrorist team hits the bright lights of sin city. Liberate three casinos, using the new 'terrorist tagging' system to clear rooms more effectively.



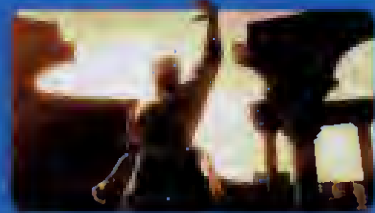
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom

Knights return home to find the king's gone mental in this generic role-player which can also be played online. Steer clear, say the early reviews.



Fatal Inertia

Koei's new hover racer should keep our laser death dreams alive while we wait for Wipeout. Exploits the power of PS3 so you can rake canyon walls with gunfire and watch falling rocks destroy your foe.



Virtua Fighter 5

The latest instalment of the purist's favourite fighting series is exclusive to PS3. It also features two new characters, and looks pretty like kittens rolling around in cherry blossom.



Virtua Tennis 3

Choose to play with the classic control system or a (frankly, convoluted) Sixaxis interpretation. Select the former and it's as instantly playable as ever, but now in smell-the-grass 1080p HD.



Tony Hawk's Project 8

The skateboarder goes back to basics in a massive return to form. Pull off stunts using Sixaxis' motion sensitivity (grinding rails feels great, trucks less so) or opt for the conventional controls.



NBA 2K7

This b-baller rocks near photo-realistic players, individually animated crowd members and the chance to take free-throws using the Sixaxis pad's motion-sensing ability.



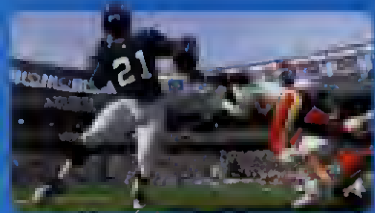
NHL 2K7

Canadians rejoice! This frozen hockey sim enables you to use the Sixaxis pad to bodycheck opponents or block shots as the keeper. Also features dramatic orchestra-scored slo-mo sequences.



Genji: Days Of The Blade

Second in the series, and still looking like a diet Onimusha. The character swap system works reasonably well, but Genji still can't hold a candle to Capcom's oriental slice 'n' dice.



Madden NFL 07

An immediate top seller in the States, inevitably, but still likely to receive a baffled shrug here. Diehard American footy fans will be pleased by the deeper running game on offer.



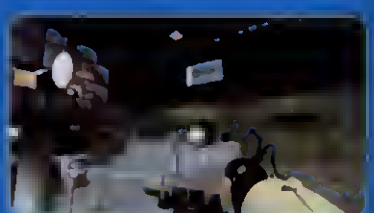
Maybe F.E.A.R.

A first-person shooter where you can see through ducts, use suppressing fire and cover objects to create cover. Plus a girl who makes people's brains go pop.



Maybe Stranglehold

A first-person shooter between Chow Yun-Fat and the excellent Psi-Ops on PS2.



Maybe Half-Life 2

A first-person shooter in the style of the game, like Episode One and Two packs, plus the multiplayer Fortress 2 and the new Portal mode.



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

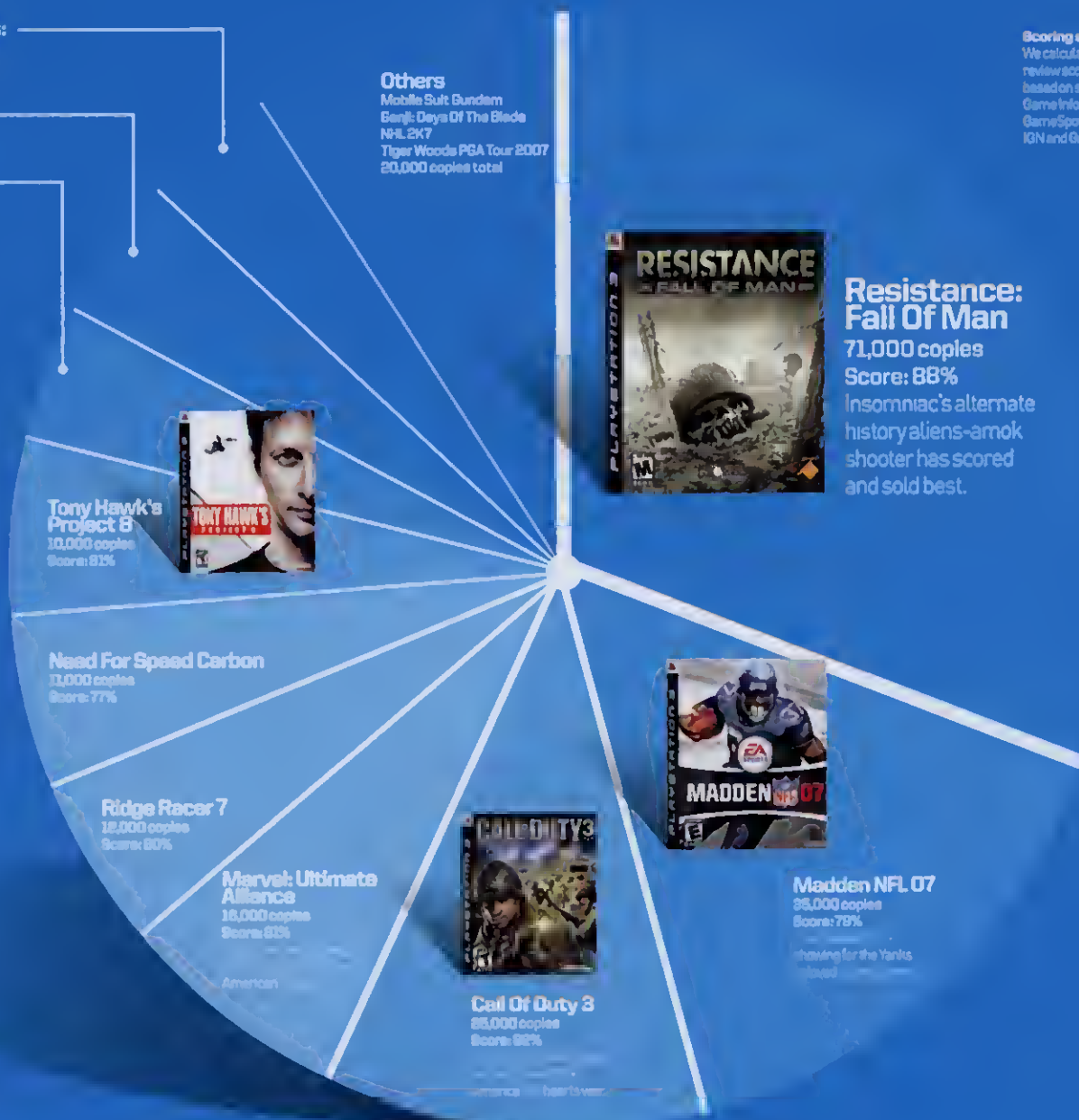
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom
8,200 copies
Score: 81%

NBA 07
8,500 copies
Score: 83%

NBA 2K7
8,000 copies
Score: 79%

Others
Mobile Suit Gundam
Genji: Days Of The Blade
NFL 2K7
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2007
20,000 copies total

Scoring system explained
We calculated the average review score for each game based on six US samples: Game Informer, 1-UP, GameSpot, Games Radar, IGN and GamesPro.



4

PS3 launch games: US sales and scores

The PS3 launch numbers are in from the States, and there's one major surprise. We already knew that Resistance: Fall Of Man was the standout game (hey, that's why it's on our cover) but original games often struggle to get noticed during a launch. So it's good to see the alien-themed shooter bucking the trend by becoming

the top seller in the first week of PS3's American life, as well as the biggest hit with the critics. After that, it's all about the big-name games, with Madden NFL 07 and Call Of Duty 3 taking silver and bronze positions in the week one chart. US retailer Gamestop said an average of 1.5 games were sold with each PS3, a low figure attributed to the fact that

many customers were purchasing the console to sell on. Meanwhile, the Japanese went for Ridge Racer 7 (30,318 sales, week one), Mobile Suit Gundam, Resistance and Genji. The UK's very own Motorstorm then topped the Japanese charts in week five.

Graphic sales figures are for first week on sale in the US. Source: The NPD Group (November 2006).



5

End of the road for Gran Turismo HD

It's now a free, one-track demo

Gran Turismo HD was supposed to be a big leap forward for PS3. It would revolutionise gaming by letting you customise your racing with new content – tracks, cars, spark plugs – bought from the PlayStation Store. That revolution has now been postponed.

Polyphony Digital has decided to cancel the GTHD project and concentrate all its efforts on the fully-fledged GT5, which should be due... sometime 2008.

The original plan was for GTHD to offer a small selection of tracks and cars for an initial fee. Players would then decide how many extras they wanted to buy. The game itself was split into two modes: 'Classic' was PS2's GT4 with hi-def graphics, while 'Premium' would give players a taste of GT5's PS3 graphics and gameplay. But following a poor reception at the Tokyo Game Show (when it emerged that downloading everything in GT4 would cost hundreds of pounds) Sony has had a rethink.

But dry your oily tears. The work done so far hasn't gone to waste. To soften the


blow, gamers are going to get Gran Turismo HD Concept. It's available now in Japan as a free download from the PlayStation Store, and features ten cars plus the mountainous Eiger Nordwand course in two different layouts. The good news (beyond the freeness) is that Concept has been built to the GT5 spec – so you get the visual flourishes, retooled handling and physics of the full next-gen game. Two modes are included: Time Attack and Drift Trial, although neither are playable online. (For that you'll have to wait until GT5.)

Expect GT Concept to be available for download once Europe's PlayStation Store opens in March.

We plan to bring you a full GTHD Concept playtest in Issue 3, on sale 7 February.

The GT garage

The revamped GTHD Concept download will feature ten cars. Here's what you'll get:
Ferrari 599 GTB '06
Honda Integra Type-R
Lotus Elise 111R '04
Mazda Roadster '07
Mitsubishi Lancer Evo 9 CSR '05
Nissan Skyline GT-R Spec II '06
Subaru Impreza rally car '99
Subaru Impreza
Toyota Celica rally car '95
Suzuki Cappuccino



Dev talk
"The concepts previously communicated as GTHD have been absorbed into GT5. There may be opportunities for other concept releases... they have an experimental role..."
Kazunori Yamauchi
Polyphony President





6

Alien is resurrected

Sega to hatch a brand new shooter and RPG

"They're coming out the goddamn walls!" It's been a long time since we've shouted that while mowing down hordes of hostile horrors or screaming as Facehuggers whip past our face; so the prospect of Aliens bursting onto PS3 has been greeted with universal glee.

Especially as Sega has chosen two quality teams to handle development duties. Obsidian (Knights Of The Old Republic II) will produce the role player,

while Gearbox (Brothers In Arms) will handle the shooter. Gearbox' previous work further suggests the FPS will favour tense, claustrophobic action, and character-driven storytelling, over mindless blasting.

Movie tie-ins are out, though. Sega's Mike Gallo says the new games "will not follow the strict storylines of any of the films but will provide a new experience by drawing from the history."

So what can we expect? How about a horrific chest-bursting scene? Sound design is key (remember the quickening pulse of the motion sensors). We'd also love some next-gen destruction as Alien acid blood melts clean through levels. And imagine stealth sections filled with poorly lit rooms, slowly hatching eggs, and a drooling Alien Queen.

Aliens will invade PS3 in 2008 and will be published by Sega.

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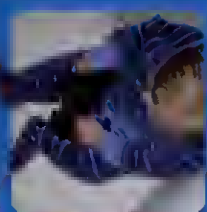
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CONTRACT
PER WEEK INCLU



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



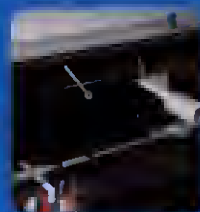
Youngest PS3 player



Is that safe?



Man's best friend, and dog



Faked? (looks too small)



Side by side in harmony?



Reflected glory...



Teleshw



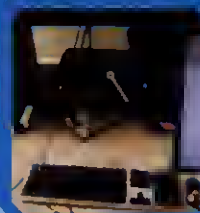
Hardly the diet version...



Furriest fan



The



Scruffiest setup



Biggest screen



Best-road gamer



Disrespectful cutter.



Grooviest fan



James rug



Best mounted screen



Bo-love



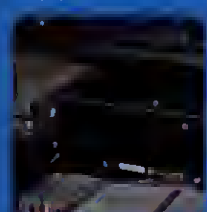
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Not switched on yet!



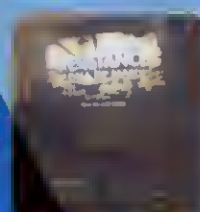
Snug fit



Ultimate girlfriend



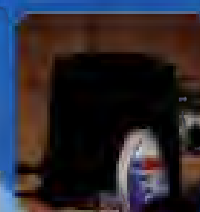
Tama



Ready!



...



Footrest



HAL lives

7

PlayStation 3: home at last

US PS3 owners show off their new babies

At it's most chaotic, footage of the PS3 launch in America looked like apocalyptic urban breakdown from a zombie film. [See page 74 for the full launch lunacy story.] Punters who were lucky enough to grab a machine and make it home amid the frenzy, were entitled to feel relieved and pleased as punch (once they'd burned their bloody, ragged clothes). With the deadbolt engaged on the front door and PS3 safely installed, it was time to dim the lights, whip out the camera phone and

start whispering 'yeah, work it baby' at the console's glossy black curves.

So while the UK waits with fingers crossed for Sony to hit the Euro launch button, Americans have been flocking to Flickr to upload their [often eccentric, always entertaining] PS3 trophy snaps. These are warts 'n' all, real-world setups of PS3 in its natural home, rather than the hopelessly aspirational pictures of ice-cool models and loft apartments so beloved of advertising types. Look, be jealous, and be inspired. There's still plenty of time to plan your own 'mood lighting' before March.

Want to see more? Check out Flickr.com. And why not upload a photo of your setup in March? We'll be watching...



Sorted

"We love it!"

Expat gamer Michael Martin is so proud of his PS3 that when we told him we wanted to use his photo he provided a new one just for us. "The two guys on the left ignoring the controller's wireless function are Americans. Sadly, none of us were accepted at the Imperial Academy, so... protection's up to the little guys on the front line there."

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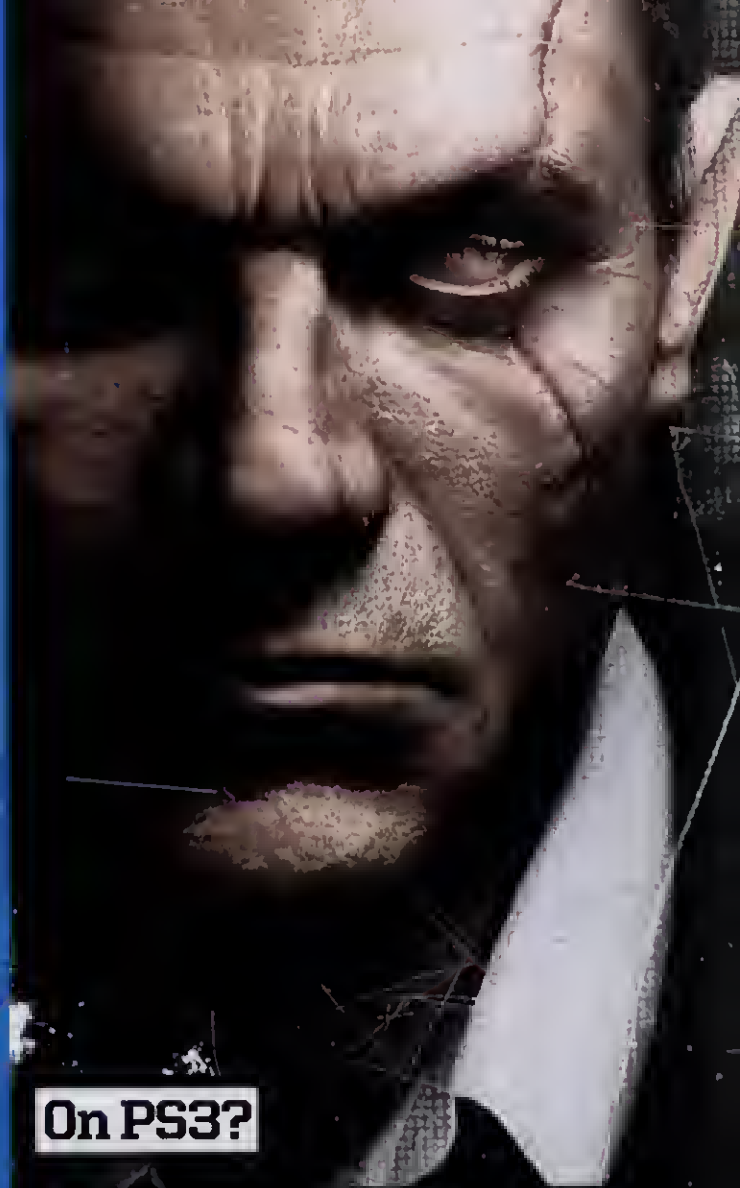


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Total Film: The Movie Magazine You Can Rely On.



On PS3?

BioShock Hugely promising horror-tinged first-person shooter set in an underwater city. Announced as an Xbox 360 exclusive last September, despite the fact Take Two had previously talked openly about a PS3 version. It's a firm favourite to appear on PS3 within months of an Xbox release.



On PS3?

Kane & Lynch: Dead Men

Dark action game starring a drugged-up psycho and a mercenary with 'issues'. Looks good and is 'exclusive' to 360. Read the fine print, though; it says 'initially' exclusive. Expect to see it on PS3.

8

PS3 grabs rival

Big '360-only' games on the way to PS3

Everyone knows that games are the most important factor when deciding which next-gen console to buy, especially exclusive games. But genuine single-format exclusives will be very rare on the next-generation consoles. The trend now is for so-called 'exclusives' to appear on one console first, and then appear on other systems after a short period of time, usually 6-12 months. So while 360 owners are pretty

happy with the likes of Dead Rising and Pro Evo now, even better versions are set to appear on PS3 in the near future.

PS3 currently has its own healthy crop of exclusives lined up, with the likes of Virtua Fighter 5, Final Fantasy XIII, Devil May Cry 4 and Metal Gear Solid 4 all slated to arrive on Sony hardware first. But it seems the situation could have been even better. Newsweek ran an article suggesting that Sony missed out on exclusive deals for Assassin's Creed and worse, GTAIV, due to feet-dragging by Sony Computer Entertainment Chairman Ken Kutaragi. A suggestion Sony has since denied.

From an independent publisher's point of view, there are several benefits to making your game a single-format exclusive on a temporary basis. The console manufacturer will often provide incentives to be able to claim an exclusive, such as splitting the cost of TV advertising. But hard cash is the main lure. Last generation, Microsoft struggled to secure exclusives when faced with PS2's enormous lead, but this time Team Gates has thrown money at the problem. Many of our industry sources have admitted to cheque-books being used to secure time-limited, exclusivity deals on big releases.



On PS3?

Dead Rising Stunning zombie gore-fest in the first wave of Capcom's next-gen line-up along with Dead Planet. Producer Jun Takeuchi says the titles should stay 360 exclusive, but Capcom policy is to eventually release every major game on multiformats. A stick-on cert to appear on PS3.

smashes

Speaking to Newsweek, Sony Computer Entertainment America's Executive VP Jack Tretton said: "You'd be crazy to say that you would never entertain or welcome exclusives. It's just a question of how deep into your pockets you have to reach to secure them. Desperation breeds deep pockets, confidence breeds the opposite. When it makes sense, you do the deal and when it doesn't, you pass." This explains why GTAIV will now appear on both PS3 and 360.

The exceptions to the rule are first-party games, when system

makers bankroll their in-house teams to create prestige titles (e.g. Sony's Gran Turismo, Microsoft's Halo and Nintendo's Mario).

But most exclusive deals are for a limited period only. Once that time is up, game publishers are free to release their title on other consoles. Something that most do in order to turn a profit, especially as the cost of making games has soared. So think of a next-gen game you want to play on PS3; the chances are it's already under development.

GTAIV is due for release on PlayStation 3 on 18 October this year.

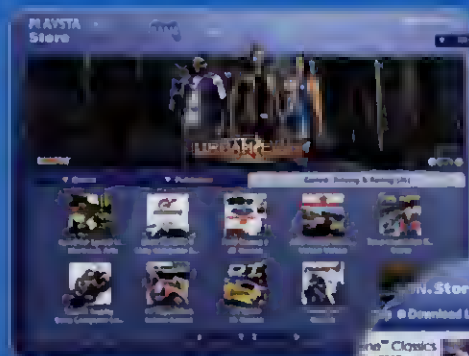
The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about



9 PS3 Store in business...

...but there's not much shopping to be done



The US Store content is minimal, but the situation is improving all the time.

PlayStation 3 is all about delivering the complete entertainment experience – so yes, there will be shopping. Visiting the PlayStation Store is likely to become a daily ritual for PS3 owners, as compulsive as cruising eBay, but with the advantage of being able to buy machine guns and sailor outfits without getting 'red flagged' by MI5.

Store needs more

What's available right now? Entering via a US machine, there are currently four downloadable games: Blast Factor, Cash Guns Chaos, Go! Sudoku and Lemmings. The first bunch of PS1 titles are also available for transfer to PSP via USB cable. US gamers can opt for Cool Boarders, Crash Bandicoot, Hot Shots Golf 2, Syphon Filter or Tekken 2 – all at just \$5.99 a pop. In Japan, Resident Evil, Silent Bomber and Mr Driller head the list. Plus, a Christmas demo of LocoRoco was made available to both territories in December. There's also a selection of playable demos, including Genji: Days Of The Blade plus a smattering of game and movie trailers. Overall though, the Store is currently sparse like an '80s Soviet supermarket.

There are technical issues too. When downloading, you have to wait for the process to finish before you can do anything else. Like men, PlayStation Store can't multitask – although a firmware update to fix this is likely (for PS3, that is, not for men). Goods can only be bought in your machine's country of origin so those who've imported PS3s ahead of March's European launch can't purchase stuff. Unless, that is, they own a NatWest credit card: allegedly this type of plastic doesn't currently fall foul of the Store's territory checks.



The Big 10

Stories everyone's talking about

10 Does PS3 need HDTV?



Sony isn't holding a gun to your head and saying 'buy an HDTV or get off the PS3 bus'. If you stick with your current TV set, hooked up with a decent lead, the jump in visual quality over PS2 will blow you away. That said, if you want to see PS3 games at their best, it means investing in a new display. So the question is, does the extra visual sparkle warrant the outlay, particularly after you've already shelled out £425 on the console.

On the money

My answer is an emphatic yes. At time of writing, you can pick up a Panasonic 26" LCD for around £550 online. Not cheap, but post-Christmas prices are set to fall. Your HDTV dollar buys you entry to a world that's sharper, brighter and more detailed. Gone are gremlins like colour bleed and shimmering edges. Displaying progressively (i.e. flicker free)

Yes

says OPM editor and serial early adopter
Tim Clark



even makes it easier on the eye during extended play sessions.

People argue that you get used to how much better an HD image looks. But that's like saying you get used to how perfectly cooked T-bone steak tastes. Switch back to standard def halfway through playing Ridge Racer in 1080p and feel the jolt. The difference in quality is as palpable as VHS to DVD. And the truth is, you're going to go HD eventually. Movies, TV and online content are all shifting to HD faster than anticipated. So stop prevaricating and just get on with eBaying whatever isn't nailed down.

No

says regular contributor and technophobe
Joel Snape



There will come a time to take the HD plunge. But that will be after my current telly breaks and the look-at-how-sharp-it-is equivalent costs less than a holiday to Morocco. Yes, eventually everything's going to be in HD, but right now it's nature documentaries, football and Japanese smut. You can see the difference, but we're not talking the colour TV revolution here – it's just a chance to make out all the pores in Cat Deeley's face.

Does it make games look better? Definitely. But playing games isn't just about looking at immaculate foliage and

concocting sweat. The meat of the PS3 experience is the huge crowds, the chilling AI, the flawless physics – and you can appreciate that on a 14" portable

Too little, too soon

Look at iPods – what did early adopters get? Clunky players prone to battery trouble and system crashes; and they look bloated next to their second and third-gen siblings. It will be the same for HD – early adopters are already fretting about upscaling and incompatibility, worrying that they should've gone for the 1080p edition that's going to be half the price by the time it does anything useful. Don't be fooled by the hype: the time when you need HDTV will be when half the country's got one and the Beeb pumping out its entire output in flawless crikeyvision. Until then, spend your money on games.

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Agenda

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PES and FIFA won't be making an appearance on PS3 at launch. We ask why.

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The PlayStation month ahead and your chance to play PS3 on an IMAX screen.

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Mario Brothers and Quake 3 Arena on PS3? Aussie using his console as a grill? It's all here.

28 Analysis

It's the digital dream: iPods, phones, cameras and more plugged into PS3.

30 Tech

Objects of desire including a PSP radio, and a virtual keyboard.

When's footy coming home?

There's no football game in PS3's launch line-up. What's going on?

Microsoft have hailed Xbox 360 as the exclusive platform for football. And they mean real football not that Madden NFL nonsense. How can they get away with it? Are there no proper football games on PS3? The truth is that the two best football games – FIFA and PES – are both coming to PS3, but we're going to have to wait for them.

According to Konami (who publish PES), the delay is down to Sony itself. An official from Konami told OPM that the company didn't find out about Sony's tilt control plan for PS3 until May 2006, making it impossible to develop a fully-fledged next-gen game in time for the console's November launch. "The time frame would have been too short," the Konami spokesman said, adding, "PS3 owners deserve better than a game that's rushed out."

Shingo 'Seabass' Takatsuka, the development brain behind Pro Evolution Soccer (PES), was

never going to just bash out a quick conversion of Winning Eleven (the Japanese version of PES) in time for the PS3 launch and risk damaging a reputation built upon years of consistent design excellence. "Everything about PS3 is control, and the same goes for Pro Evo, which relies on such subtle movements," Konami's spokesman explained. "Seabass would never go with the first idea he thought up for the control issue; he wants to do it properly."

At least PES7 will be worth the wait. It's in development for PS3 and scheduled to hit shelves in October or November with a dedicated next-gen graphics engine powering the action (unlike PES6 on Xbox 360, which is based on the same technology as the PS2 version). All the trademark nudges and feints that frame the series' brilliant physicality will be heightened further by PS3's Sixaxis joystick. All the same, Christmas 2007 feels like a long way off...

No substitute

Over at EA it's a similar story. According to EA's well-lipped spokesperson, the delay is "so we can get out the best possible game". We don't expect to see FIFA 08 on PS3 until October or November. But there is some good news for football fans: our source at EA says there's a new Champions League game (a FIFA spin-off) will arrive shortly after the European launch. Suddenly Microsoft's exclusivity deal doesn't sound so exclusive.

Another explanation for the lack of football is the apparent late arrival of PS3 development kits. These are essential pieces of hardware used by



■ The launch line-up has every American sport under the sun, but there's no FIFA or PES for us European football lovers. It's a massive and upsetting oversight.



Pro Evo vs FIFA



programmers to transfer game code (initially developed on high-end PC systems) to the finished console. It's a factor no publisher will comment on but which is implied in the non-appearance of many big games for PS3 launch.

There's also a much more commercial explanation for the delay. The fact is that games released to coincide with PS3's spring launch will never sell as many copies as those released around Christmas. That's especially true for a football game that if released in March would be rendered obsolete by May when the season ends. With brands such as FIFA and PES already established as part of the gaming landscape, publishers don't want to confuse matters by changing the release date, as Konami's spokesman confirms: "Where you have a title with as much respect as Pro Evo people will wait for that builds expectation. We get more kudos for doing a good version."

So it looks like it will be a long year of waiting for PS3 football fans, as no other reputable publisher is willing to take on the two established football giants. Our solution? Simply break out those PS2 copies of PES6 and FIFA 07 and make use of that backwards compatibility feature.

RUMOUR MACHINE

Insider whispers

There's still a chance that the 20GB version of PlayStation 3 won't be released in Europe.



LucasArts plans to release a next-gen version of its Star Wars Battlefront multi-player series.



Talk persists of a Call Of Duty spin-off, this time set during a modern-day conflict.



Sony is in talks with Amazon about a deal to make movies available to download to your PSP next year.

Work has already started on Motorstorm 2, and developer Evolution also has a secret project under way.

Sticky ball fans rejoice! Namco Bandai has registered the following trademarks: Katamari Damacy-kun, Beautiful Katamari Damacy and Katamari Damacy Tres Bien.

Final Fantasy Tactics: The Lion War for PSP will be a remake of the brilliant PS1 tactical RPG.



The PlayStation month ahead...

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	PlayStation	JAN 10 OPM 2 on sale And it's in your hands right now. Drop us an email to let us know what you think - we're at opm@futurenet.co.uk futurenet.co.uk	11 Game over Nail-biting action as the first televised World Series of Video Games Summer Championship draws to a grand finale in the US. Watch it at: gameplayhd.com	12 Pocket billiards Steve Davis makes an appearance at Game in Leeds. He's promoting World Snooker Championship 2007, out on PS2 today. game.co.uk		14 Phone home The little green men pack up ship as highbrow sci-fi exhibition Alien Nation closes at London's Institute Of Contemporary Arts. ica.org.uk
15 Stock crash NASCAR-themed laughs with Will Ferrell as Talladega Nights: The Ballad Of Ricky Bobby lands on DVD. sonypictures.com/movies	16 Open warfare MMORPG freaks rejoice as World Of Warcraft: The Burning Crusade launches on Windows and Mac. worldofwarcraft.com		18 Car control Cruel laughs and elegant one-liners as posh comic Jimmy Carr plays Wolverhampton Civic Hall. jimmycarr.com		20 Chelsea vs Liverpool Watch it unfold on Sky Sports - or avoid the inevitable, crushing disappointment and recreate it on Pro Evo... home.skysports.com	21 Black arts Last chance to see David Shrigley's exhibition of cartoons, animations and assorted dark comedy at the DCA in Dundee. dca.org.uk
	23 The bet Fancy a flutter? ICEI, one of the world's premier online gambling exhibitions, celebrates its third consecutive year at Earls Court Two. icei.co.uk			26 Going underground Dungeon Siege: Throne Of Agony marks the cellar-crawling series' debut on PSP. 2kgames.com/throneofagony	27 Bloc start UK tour Acclaimed Brit post-punks celebrate the release of their second album, A Weekend In The City, with a string of UK dates. blocparty.com	28 Sound and vision PlayStation season at London's V&A continues with Volume, a luminous interactive display that responds to human movement. vam.ac.uk
29 Return to Springfield Finely hone your declaration of 'worst episode ever' as The Simpsons Series 9 hits the shelves on DVD. thesimpsons.com				FEB 02 Checks away EA's latest WW2 shooter, Medal Of Honor: Airborne is out today on PlayStation 2. moh.ea.com		
05 Brush strokes Brighten up your February with Okami, Capcom's water-colour wolf game, out today in the UK on PS2. www2.capcom.com/okami						

7 Feb
OPM 3 on sale, see our subs offer on page 122

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Win

Want to play PS3 now?

Here's how...

Picture it: a whole month before release, you could be playing PS3 on a screen the size of four double-decker buses with your ears buffeted with full surround sound. As part of the Game On exhibition, London's Science Museum has thrown open the doors to its 3D IMAX cinema and dangled the chance for one OPM reader and seven lucky friends to debut a handful of PS3 games in style. You'll also be able to bring your own PS2, Wii or Xbox 360 games, memory cards and extra controllers. And for ten runners-up, there's free entry for two to the Science Museum's Game On exhibition – the past, present, and future of gaming. For more information on the exhibition visit this site: sciencemuseum.org.uk/exhibitions/gameon.

To be in with a chance, answer the following question: **One of the events at Game On commemorates the ten-year anniversary of a popular gaming heroine? Is it:**



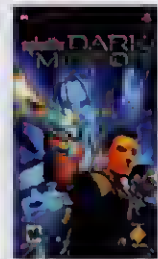
Send entries to 'I Want To Play PS3 Now', Official PlayStation Magazine, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath, BA1 2BW, or to opm@futurenet.co.uk putting 'I Want To Play PS3 Now' in the subject line. Alternatively text SMP33 followed by a space, then your answer (A, B or C), then another space, followed by your name and address to 80889.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS Only UK residents over the age of 18 may enter. Travel/accommodation/refreshments are not included. Only the first entry that OPM draws and judges to be correct will win the prize. Main winner must be available to go to the Science Museum on 6 February 2007. Closing date for entries is 12pm 26/01/07. Winners will be notified after 12pm on 26/01/07. No correspondence will be entered in to. No employees of Future Publishing, any associated company, or any member of their close family may enter. Prizes are as stated and no alternatives, cash or otherwise are available. By texting you are agreeing to receive details of future offers from Future Publishing Ltd and third parties. If you do not wish to receive this information text the word NO at the end of your text message. Texts will be charged at 50p plus your standard network tariff rate. Please source all necessary permissions. We will not advise non-winners of the result. Barrington Harvey PR is providing the prize. Future Publishing Ltd is not responsible whatsoever for any failure by Barrington Harvey to provide the prize on time or at all, or for any loss, damage, costs, expenses, or personal injury caused by the prize. If you have any query or complaint in relation to the prize, you should contact Barrington Harvey. Editor's decision is final. No purchase necessary.

COMMUTER AND VIDEO GAMES

Perfect games for boring trips

Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror on a train



Having arranged my knees into what passes for legroom on the 3.45pm to Paddington, I settled into a bout of Syphon Filter. Having found a volume level that a) drowned out the nearby woman shouting at her phone and b) didn't make blood come out of my nose, I settled down to play.

It was perfect escapism. Wedged into my seat and hunched over the screen the journey was soon forgotten as I rescued UN soldiers, chased terrorists and neutralised chemical weapons. The only time reality intruded was when a tannoy message broke over a cut-scene. As PSP and the train announcement fought for my attention I ended up hearing: "The terrorists have opened the buffet car, we have to change at Swindon or thousands will be killed!" I had a cup of tea and got off at Paddington. Nobody died.

PSP Travel Safety Tip

Refrain from over-exuberant celebrations when playing WiFi Pro E vo in the quiet carriage.



FIVE MINUTE SKIVE

Web games to play when the boss is away



Insaniquarium

Forget real goldfish with their tiny brains and vacant stares – the little critters in this game crap money. Feed them and collect their golden droppings.

popcap.com/launchpage.php?theGame=insaniquarium



Scribble

Lemmings for artistic types. Help each little 'Blox' get around the terrain by drawing ramps, steps and bridges. You have limited ink and your lines dissolve over time.

nitrome.com/games/scribble



Spectral Wizard

Put some magic back in your life with a wizardy platformer. Collect colour tokens to put into your 'Blinking Machine' that turns the land from mono to glorious Technicolor.

miniclip.com/games/spectral-wizard/en

Play Mario on your PS3

Retro games and rival formats are a go on Sony's console

Play a bigger range of games than anyone could have imagined, including all-time classics like Nintendo's NES-era Mario Brothers and the PC's Quake 3 Arena.

It's all possible thanks to Linux, the famed Windows-baiting, penguin-faced, operating system (OS). This open source OS turns PS3 into a personal computer, complete with a PC-style desktop interface. It's capable of running almost any software – from Windows XP to word processors and email. Better still, Linux can make emulators run on PS3.

These freeware programs use the machine's next-gen processing power to simulate the abilities of older hardware, such as a SNES, PC or old arcade cabinets, and give gamers access to a massive historical archive of videogaming's past glories.

It's also against the law. Downloading retro game files (known as ROMs) is just as dodgy as illegally swapping MP3s. And the problems don't end there. Emulating also demands a fair dollop of technical knowledge to set up the software. And that's before you even get into messing about with your PS3's official OS.

Strangely, Linux runs on PS3 with the tacit blessing of Sony. The 'Install New OS' option in PS3's settings menu enables you to upload any version of Linux.

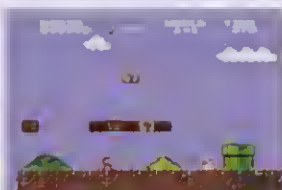
adapted for PlayStation. [See available packages at fedora.redhat.com or terrasoftsolutions.com].

But, as everyone knows, there is a thriving emulation scene, operating via web sites and forums, that spreads the retro word and presents the industry with major copyright protection issues.

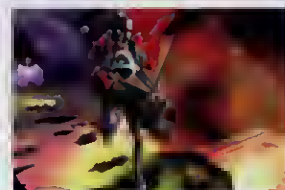
The question is what will Sony do next? PSP uses firmware updates to block emulation and PS3 could follow suit by preventing Linux accessing vital console functions. For example, Linux is currently unable to access the PS3's graphics chip, which limits software performance and means anything other than 2D retro titles are slow and clunky.

PS3 arcade cabinet

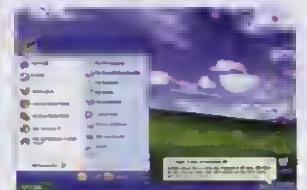
Software emulated on PS3 so far



Mario Brothers NES
tinyurl.com/y2cfwa



Quake 3 Arena PC
tinyurl.com/y4lbbo



Windows XP PC
tinyurl.com/y2aoq9



Marvel vs Capcom Arcade
tinyurl.com/y4w9ec



Dragon Ball Z SNES
tinyurl.com/wla27



Pac-Man Arcade
tinyurl.com/ve63z

PlayStation 3 overheats

Aussie converts his machine into a desktop sausage-warmer

When early prototype images of a silver PS3 were released by Sony in 2005, the running joke was that it looked uncannily like a George Foreman Grill, America's favourite product for barbecuing cattle. Sony later revealed the final black design, and Foreman Grill comparisons were mostly forgotten. Except by Australian James Kingham.

In early November, the New South Wales resident shelled out AU\$1500 (£600) to import a 20GB Japanese PS3 with Ridge Racer 7, an extra controller and a memory card adaptor. After a quick blast on Ridge (his verdict: "disappointing"), he set about attacking the PS3 – prising it apart and gutting all its innards. Once the machine was hollow, Kingham slotted in a shop-bought electric hot plate, plugged it in and the 'PS3 Grill' was born.

Obviously it couldn't play essential titles like Resistance or Call Of Duty 3, but Kingham insists that it could frazzle a mean steak in 15 minutes. Explaining his sacrilege, the gourmet hacker commented: "We heard the PS3 was good, so I made it better – by turning it into a grill!"



▲ Cooking sausages on your home console: guaranteed to invalidate your warranty.



■ After finishing his experiment, Kingham put the PS3 back together and sold it on eBay – although he admits he "maybe forgot to mention" its former life as next-gen kitchenware.



WHO SAID THAT?

V.I.P. quotes

"I don't think I'm the sh***! I don't think our fighting system's as good as Devil May Cry! I think I'm just doing the best I can." God Of War creator **David Jaffe** 'tired and emotional' at a Playboy party.



"Nobody beats me at PlayStation."

Arsenal's **Cesc Fàbregas** is

just as cocky when it comes to Pro Evo.



"Sony can make 80,000 bricks and people would buy them." **Bill Gates** doesn't fancy fighting Sony in the building trade.



"I wasn't thinking about my wound, just those PS3s."

Michael Penkala prioritises after being shot in a PS3 robbery."

OPM HOT TOPIC

What do you think of the new Sixaxis joypad?



Matt Woodley
Creative Director,
Sony Europe

"It's obvious to make comparisons with Nintendo's Wiimote. The Sixaxis, while not as flexible, does work well and will have definite gameplay benefits."



Chris Bailey
Store Manager,
PlayStation

"It adds an extra element to the gameplay. There will finally be a point to people leaning around corners in driving games when they're playing them."



Alexandre Parizau
Producer,
Gran Turismo Sport

"I was curious about the tilt feature and as soon as I grabbed the controller to test it in our game, I was sold on it immediately."



Kristian von Fersen
Assistant Producer,
Gran Turismo Sport

"The Sixaxis gives us a much greater level of control in steering the car; it introduces unique movement functionality that's new to the racing genre."

What plugs in?

We chase PS3's multi-media dream

The Sony videos said it would be great. In the future, you could plug all your electronic gear into PS3 and sit at the centre of an amazing digital whirlwind. Music, video and pictures streaming onto your TV as PS3 orchestrated a network of mobile phones, cameras and MP3 players. So the future is now. Does it all work? Does PS3 deliver 'convergence'. We shoved a bunch of stuff into its wanton USB ports to find out...

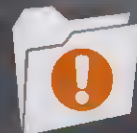


iPod

Frustrating. PS3 found the iPod but locating any actual music proved trickier. Eventually we found our MP3s hidden in an 'iPod Control' folder. And while we could select and play songs only a handful displayed artists or album names.

Keyboard & mouse

No problems. Both devices work instantly, allowing text input with the keyboard and cursor control with the mouse. It makes navigating the internet easier although you still need to type into the PS3's custom text entry window first, rather than directly onto a web page.



File under fiddly

PS3 can access content from most USB devices, but only those that don't require additional software and often only if it puts stuff in precisely labelled folders (see page 2 of our PS3 Systems Guide for more). The interface is often not intuitive enough to use and involves messing around on a PC before PS3 will recognise items. The lack of support for popular video files (WMV and Mov) is also irritating, as is PS3's personality clash with iPod. All these issues need sorting out as quickly as possible in an urgent firmware update.

USB Flash drive

PS3 recognised and named the drive straight away. Music, video and pictures were all instantly accessible and could be copied to and from the hard drive.



PlayStation Portable

Remote Play enables you to wirelessly access all the PS3's content on your PSP. Joining the two with a USB cable enabled the PS3 to view and copy any of the contents of the PSP's memory card.



Digital camera

Plugging in a camera enabled PS3 to access the images on its internal memory card and copy pictures to and from the hard drive.



Sony camcorder

PS3 can display and transfer digital photos stored on the camcorder's memory card. However, it wasn't possible to stream video from the card, nor to access movies recorded to the camcorder's tape.





EyeToy camera

Sony's party cam linked up immediately, so you can video chat with anyone on your friends list. A generic PC webcam doesn't work.



External USB hard drive

Instant recognition by XMB which displayed the accessible content on the 120GB hard drive. Handy for increasing storage capacity without taking a screwdriver to PS3's hard disk.



Laptop

Connecting a laptop via ethernet cable got top response from PS3. The laptop confidently confirmed that the cable was connected and running, but PS3 didn't want to know. A USB connection didn't work either.



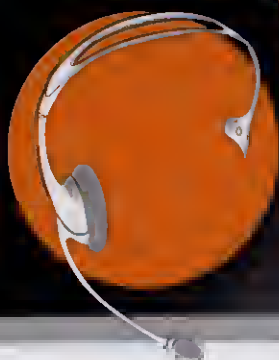
Mobile phone

Connecting a camera phone via USB let PS3 browse and copy photos stored on the mobile's memory card. But the phone's internal filing system meant that video files and MP3s remained frustratingly inaccessible. We couldn't make a Bluetooth connection, either.



Memory cards

The 60GB model comes with card slots for Compact Flash, SD and Memory Stick Duo cards, while the 20GB can connect to any USB memory card reader. Either way, the cards appear on the PS3 menu with the content easily accessible and transferable



PlayStation 2 SOCOM headset

Connecting the headset was easy, it could be calibrated and tested in the Settings menu. Hot squad chat awaits.

PLAYSTATION TOP 10 CHARTS

What's selling like hot cakes, or smelling like arse cakes

PS2

- 1 ▲ FIFA 07
- 2 ▼ Need For Speed Carbon
- 3 ▲ Call Of Duty 3
- 4 ▲ WWE SmackDown Vs RAW 2007
- 5 ▼ Pro Evolution Soccer 6
- 6 ▼ Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy
- 7 ▲ The Sims 2 Pets
- 8 ▼ Call Of Duty: Call Of Duty Edit
- 9 ▼ Guitar Hero II
- 10 ▼ Buzz! The Big Quiz

Source: chart-track.co.uk

PSP

- 1 ● Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories
- 2 ● FIFA 07
- 3 ▼ Pro Evolution Soccer 6
- 4 ▼ Need For Speed Carbon
- 5 ▼ Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy
- 6 ▼ Medal Of Honor: Heroes
- 7 ▲ Tekken: Dark Resurrection
- 8 ▲ Football Manager 2007
- 9 ▲ Sonic Rivals
- 10 ▼ POC: Dead Man's Chest

Source: chart-track.co.uk

PS3

- 1 ● Resistance: Fall Of Man
- 2 ● Madden NFL 07
- 3 ● Call Of Duty 3
- 4 ● Marvel: Ultimate Alliance
- 5 ● Ridge Racer 7
- 6 ● Need For Speed Carbon
- 7 ● Tony Hawk's Project 8
- 8 ● NBA 2K7
- 9 ● NBA 07
- 10 ● Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom

Source: npd.com (US chart)



Griffin iFM

£26
i.co.uk

Talisman Face Plates

Turn your PSP into a furry friend with cow and leopard print face plates.

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divino.co.uk



Logitech Chillstream

Avoid clammy hand syndrome with this cool PS3 joypad complete with a built-in fan.

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Brand new peripheral porn to spice up your PlayStation love life



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54 METAL GEAR SOLID 4

Meet the major players in MGS4. Can't tell your Ocelot from your Otacon? Then get a load of this.

PlayStation® Official Magazine - UK Previews



033

Setting our sights on every new game heading your way

Welcome to the most info-packed and up-to-date previews section around. Why? Because we go that little bit further; chasing down developers, talking to the people that actually make the games and not giving up until they tell us exactly what we want to know.

This month we find out just how sharp Heavenly Sword's slash-'em-up action is (p50) and investigate Sony's online potential with Motorstorm (p46). Then there's new information on the return of Stuntman (p40), potential Tony Hawk's-beater Skate (p45) and we find out how to recruit new members to your squad in MGS: Portable Ops (p48).

We also uncover the previously MIA Medal Of Honor: Airborne (p57) to see if EA's flagging WW2 shooter can fight its way back to the top. And that's only the half of it. Over the next 24 pages every incoming PS3, PS2 and PSP game worthy of your attention and hard-earned cash is here and dissected with precision and passion. Get stuck in.



34

VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

The thinking man's face-rearranger limbers up - find out why it's the best fighter on PlayStation 3.



39

MERCENARIES 2

Exclusive shots and information on the brilliant new instalment of the pay-as-you-go military adventure.



56

GOD OF WAR II

Kratos is back and more belligerent than ever, but will his return top the savage heights of the original?



Preview

▶ Akira's regarded as the toughest character to master - you have to get your reaction time down to single frames to pull off his more advanced moves. Still, just check out the weave on that headband...

PS3 Exclusive **Format** PS3 **ETA** March **Pub** Sega **Dev** Sega **AM2**

Virtua Fighter 5

⊙ Here ⊙ Comes ⊗ The ⊠ Champ

Dojo mojo

Wax on...

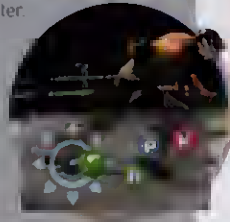
Dojo mode's been scaled back since Evo, but it'll still put you through your paces on every move.

...Wax off

Hit markers show whether moves connect high or low, and explain whether they can be used as a counter.

Crane kick!

Best of all, you can tell the AI to constantly block, evade or use a specific move, then practise counters against that



Low-walled arenas encourage juggling-based ring-outs, but they aren't easy.

Fact: there are real martial arts that'll give you a black belt after less training than it takes to get good at Virtua Fighter. With a frightening array of technical concepts to digest before you should even start thinking about combos – throw-escape buffering, crouch-dashing and the legendary 'Korean stepping' are just the start – it's a game that demands intimidating levels of commitment before the 'fun' can start. But that's sort of the point: watch two high-quality players fight in VF, and you'll see a ballet of violence that's nothing like Tekken's juggle-heavy tedium. Try button-mashing against even a half-decent player and he'll trounce you every single time. And you only need to take a look at Virtua Fighter 5 – with its glittering backdrops, astonishing character detail and Segastastic sense of fun – to fall in love. Realistically, you're already ten years behind – but there's never been a better time to get into Virtua Fighter. So where do you start?

White belt

"With the basics," says Sega playtester Remi McKenzie. "There's no point jumping in and trying to pull 100-hit strings straight away – you need to learn the system first." A fan of the series since the first game, Remi started to get seriously into VF with part four – and that's when the real training started. He used to play for anywhere up to 12 hours at a time, although he points out that, "I was with friends, so it was a social thing."



Lion's the fighter of choice for top-tier Japanese 'pok'ers – people who job a lot – and is immensely satisfying to lay a beating on.



Now he's one of the top ten players in the UK, he's flown to Japan to take part in tournaments and he routinely pulls out moves we've never even seen before. He mostly plays as series mainstay Pai, although he's working on his game with Korean monkey-girl Eileen, one of VF5's two new characters. "She's quite weak,"

he explains, "so you have to get a lot of hits to win, but she's good at linking one move to the next." He's spent less time with flashy Lucha Libre wrestler El Blaze, but remains impressed. "He's all over the place. He shows off a lot, but he moves completely differently to all the

Timeline Virtua Fighter's highs and lows

INSPIRED
DISMAL

Virtua Fighter (32x, 1993)
The first ever 3D fighting game, so you can't blame it for looking a little bit... Sega

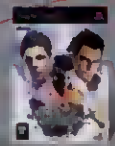


Virtua Fighter 2 (Saturn, 1995)
Lion and Shun Di join the roster while Sega's Model 2 supplies the best arcade graphics ever

Virtua Fighter 3 (Dreamcast, 1998)
Taka Arashi and a fourth button for evading appear, only to be ditched straight away



Virtua Fighter 4 (PS2, 2002)
Va - Todority Vanessa and monk Lei Fei join the crew



Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution (PS2, 2003)
John and Brad get involved, while the... detailed tutorial mode ever introduced



Virtua Fighter 4: Final Tuned (Arcade, 2004)
Japanese arcade-only update that added a couple of costumes and tweaked the... characters' skills

2001

TIMELINE

2006

other characters – running around is the most important part of his game.” Eileen’s your typical cute girl, but Blaze is something new: a character who literally runs circles around opponents. Crucially, he’s also got the best pre-fight taunt in the game, bellowing, “Start running... NOWWWW!” at opponents as he bounces confidently around.

Shifting stance

For the VF fan unwilling to abandon their investment in other characters, though, there’s still plenty to do. Other characters have been tweaked, polished, beefed up or stripped down to maintain Virtua Fighter’s famously balanced playing field. A minor example is ninja Kage’s 10ft-toss; as the basis for dozens of juggle combos it was a little bit easy to do before, so Sega has changed the command to make it trickier to pull off in a heated fight. Though it isn’t the kind of thing we can see at a glance, Remi assures us that the frame-count on key Akira moves has changed, and Pai’s throw animations have been subtly reanimated – minor changes with potentially huge ramifications.

Another shift that Remi admits he’s yet to get to grips with properly is the new ‘offensive evade’ – prodding up or down on the stick with all three buttons prompts a forward-moving slip, a more aggressive alternative to the typical sideways shuffle. Even more subtly, some arenas now come with low walls – meaning that it’s still possible to pull off a ring-out victory, but only with certain juggle moves – though top-tier players apparently don’t aim for that much.

But what should we be doing? “You need to start with simple moves, such as

❑ The graphics don’t show off Sarah that well, because of her soft, wrinkle-free face. Sigh.

throw-escapes and guarding, and get on the forums and work out the basics. That’s the stuff I wish somebody had told me when I was just starting out,” says Remi, trouncing us as we try to pull out our best combos with Kage.

Even learning simple moves, such as the fall-recovery – tapping all three buttons as you hit the tiles makes you instantly leap back to your feet – makes a

Superfan Top gamer speaks his mind



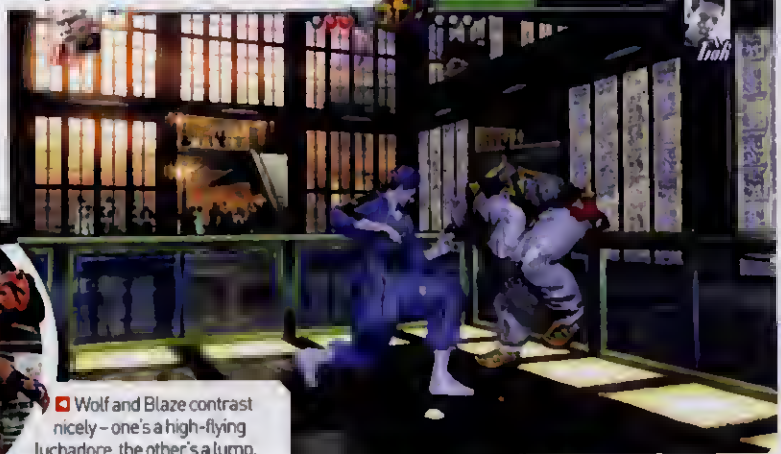
Dan Read A feared competitor on the international VF circuit joined OPM to play the new PS3 version.

“I think they’ve made some changes that needed to be made with this edition. I haven’t played Final Tuned much and haven’t had much chance to get to grips with the new evade system yet, but I like the look of the new characters. And honestly, look at it – it’s amazing. I’ll be buying a PlayStation 3 just for Virtua Fighter, no question.”



❑ Lingerin' pre-fight taunts showcase every stitch and bulging vein. Impressive stuff.

❑ As in Tekken, time is moving on – this is the first game to feature a greying Lau Chan.



❑ Wolf and Blaze contrast nicely – one's a high-flying luchadore, the other's a lump.



❑ Soft lad Jackie just wants to drive race cars.



huge difference to your play, and are essential to learn before you start fighting seriously. "Also, it's no good just playing against the computer, because it always does the same things," advises Remi. "You need to get your friends involved and start going to tournaments." For absolute beginners there's a dojo mode that'll take you through the basics, forcing you to practise each move again and again – though it's nowhere near as in-depth as VF Evolution's training system. You'll also want to pick the right character: Lau and Jackie are good bets, but we're told you shouldn't even think

about tackling Akira until you've been playing for a couple of years. Top players tend to favour Akira, Jackie and Kage, while show-offs – such as legendary Japanese fighter Chibita and Dan, a Bath-based VF expert we've drafted in to fight Remi – favour Lion. The best fighter in the UK is Sega's Ryan Hart, also a world champ at Tekken and Street Fighter III – though his VF game still can't stand up to the top Japanese players, such as Itabashi. Seeing expert players like Remi and Dan fight on Virtua Fighter is a revelation: suddenly, moves that seemed pointless

before fit into the flow of play, and moves are dodged, parried and countered constantly. In fact, there's only one thing still causing concern to the UK Virtua Fighter community: will there be a stick for the UK? Sega will be releasing one in Japan – it was on hand at the Tokyo Game Show – but whether it'll make it to these shores remains in question. Fingers crossed, then – and in the meantime, dig out a copy of Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution to get in some practice. It might be tougher than earning a real black belt, but you won't end up with quite as many bruises.

Talking trash with Tarantino...

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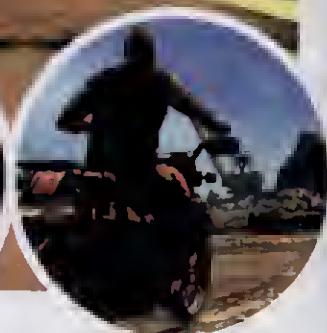
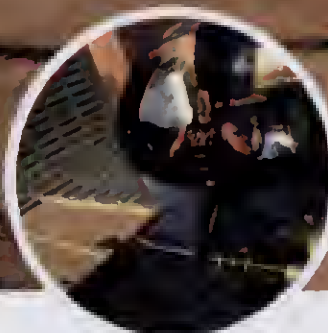
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Preview

Things blow up in a big way - watch out for flying debris.



Format PS3 ETA 2007 Pub TBC Dev Pandemic Studios Los Angeles

Mercenaries II: World In Flames

⊕ Oil ⊙ Corruption ⊗ Explosions ⊖ Cashback

World in flames, eh? A bold proposition. And one the Mercenaries II team has taken quite literally. This game is about destruction. Massive, outrageous, raining-biblical-fire destruction. Sky-scrapers will topple; oil rigs will collapse leg by leg; cars will explode in huge expanding balls of flame, smoke and shattered glass. This is basically a giant sandbox in which you can do anything you want with tanks and machine guns.

It's also the sequel to the excellent PS2 third-person actioner, Mercenaries. You play the role of Mattias Nilson, a gun-for-

hire trying to earn a dishonest wage from a nasty conflict over natural resources that's threatening to tear South America a new oil well.

Generalissimo Chaos

You earn money by completing contracts for rival factions - which include corrupt oil companies and a tribe of rebels called The Pirates. Over the course of the game, you develop a web of contacts who'll send you off on missions and supply you with new weapons and support. But you're battling for both sides and, if you betray a faction, they can become a thorn in your

side - a rather uncomfortable one that shoots first and asks questions later.

This back-stabbing backdrop sets the scene for frenzied running battles as you zoom around in gunships, tanks or just let rip on foot. You can also call in battlefield support (using fuel to buy options) such as airstrikes, which level foes without getting your hands dirty.

So it's the original Mercs' superb free-roaming, open-ended gunplay, pumped up on next-gen steroids. What's more, they've thrown in a co-op mode so at last you can get a mate to chauffeur you around while you get busy spraying lead.

5 best features Why the World In Flames is a good thing

1

Hijackings
Nabbing a vehicle isn't easy. Wrestle for control of the wheel and you'll trigger a hijacking mini-game that plays in real-time

2

Grappling hooks
Use them to scale high buildings, dispatch enemies at close-range, or even hook onto a helicopter and take to the skies.

3

The Pirates
They dress in Rasta colours and live for chaos. Their base looks like "a twisted Disneyland" This conflict just got more interesting

4

Massive explosions
Exploding vehicles fire out a rain of debris. You might be 100ft away, but you'll still need to dodge that flying tyre

5

Private armies
As your reputation grows, you'll attract a small band of fellow mercs who will open up additional jobs and give you back-up on the battlefield.

Preview

Normally this is a bad thing, but in Stuntman 2 it's the whole point.

By **M. G.** | **Format** PS3 **ETA** August 2007 **Pub** THQ **Dev** Paradigm Entertainment

Stuntman 2

⚠ Movie ⦿ Stunts ⊗ Action ◻ Crash

Stuntman was a great idea trapped in a frustrating game's body. You were a professional driver trying to pull off ludicrously risky stunts for the camera. High-speed car antics and the glamour of the movies – how could it fail? Yet fail it did. Now it's back for a second take with a new developer at the wheel. Can they get it right on PS3?

Speed around a carefully choreographed film set, smashing through crates, swerving past pedestrians and drifting round hairpins on two wheels and you'll see your score leapfrog under the watchful eye of the director and crew. Every turn and obstacle in your run-up to a big finale is a potential point-scorer, with a combo-

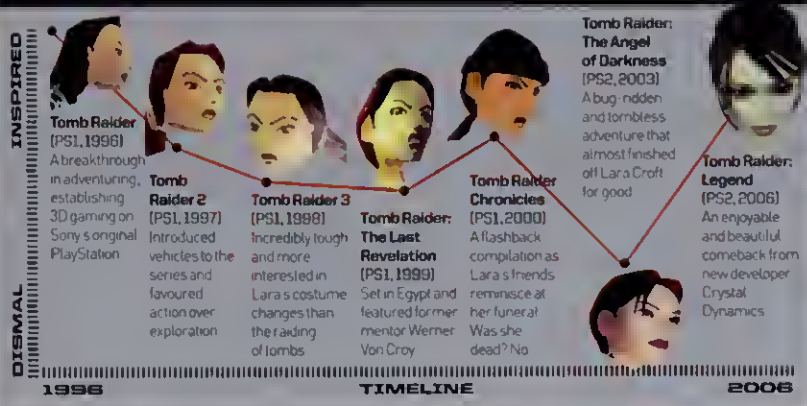
multiplier giving you a few seconds between manoeuvres to daisy-chain tricks together and clock-up big bonuses. The more stunts you perform, the larger the film's profit and the quicker you'll advance your career.

Ah yes, the inevitable career. You start on low-key ads, graduate to big commercial shoots and then to B-list films. Hold it together and you'll end up on a Hollywood movie lot, performing Bullitt-inspired San Francisco street chases or desert stunts around a Mad Max-style apocalyptic set.

The game concept clearly has a lot of potential, so let's hope it doesn't crash straight into a brick wall marked 'frustration' like the original game did.



Timeline The rise, fall and rise of Lara Croft

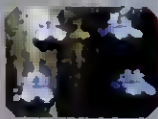


Dinosaurs and other beasts were a big part of Lara's first adventure.



Rumour monger

What films will influence Stuntman 2?



The Fifth Element

Stuntman does flying cars, but prefers ones that aren't meant to **Odds** 100-1 against!



Ronin

Features one of the greatest car chases ever committed to film **Odds** 10-1 against!



The Blues Brothers

Once held the record for the most cars destroyed in one movie **Odds** 30-1 against!

Quick pitch

Risky business

As an ace driver you'll have to make precision moves to pull off outrageous stunts.

Crash and gum

Recreate famous movie stunts in-game (such as a dizzying 007-style mountain pass pursuit).

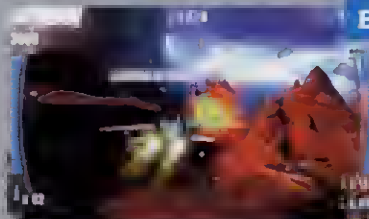
Making movies

You can film the action, upload your flicks and share 'em online with other PS3 directors.

Head-To-Head

After Burner Vs Heatseeker

Birds



We're talking Sega's classic combat shooter on PSP. Choose from 19 war planes such as the F-14D Tomcat, F-15E Strike Eagle and F-22 Raptor. All fully customisable.



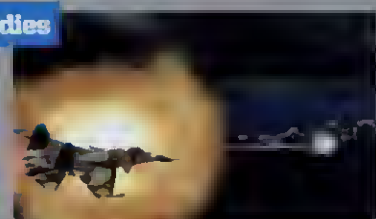
This PSP flyboy has a bumper arsenal of 30 jets, including Russia's lightning quick SU-47 Berkut and the futuristic F35 Lightning II. Plus 40 different weapons.

Winner Heatseeker boasts an air force to be reckoned with.

Baddies



Go up against a clandestine mercenary organisation known as Black Falcon. They've nicked 13 top-secret fighter planes and you have to get them back. Just have to.



Rookie pilot Mike Hudson is on his way to a Caribbean air base when he ends up battling drug-smuggling pirates bank-rolled by a local dictator - who also has a nuclear weapon.

Winner Heatseeker's unlikely Top Gun meets Pirates Of The Caribbean pitch wins out.

Legacy



The legend starts with a 1987 arcade shooter, designed by Virtua Fighter daddy, Yu Suzuki. Inspired by Top Gun, the game's seat threw you around like a real flight sim.



Designed by Ludemasters and IR Gurus, the studio behind WWF plane-hooter H-10006 Of The Pacific. However, the Gurus also created girlie horse game, Mary King Riding Star.

Winner After Burner by a considerably generous aeronautical mile.

Format PS2/PSP ETA March 2007 Pub Eidos Dev Crystal Dynamics

Tomb Raider: Anniversary

△ Classic ○ Remake ⊗ Treasure □ Hunt

Yes, it's been ten years (where's it gone?). A whole decade since Lara Croft first graced PS1 and changed the gaming landscape forever. To celebrate this milestone Eidos is releasing Tomb Raider: Anniversary, a 're-imagining' of the original Tomb Raider. The plot and settings will remain the same - Lara is hired to locate an ancient artifact and eventually discovers Atlantis - but developer Crystal Dynamics will be using the same technology behind Tomb Raider: Legend to give Lara's first adventure a thorough facelift. Graphical spit and polish is the obvious change, but it also means controls and level designs are being updated to suit the tastes of modern gamers. The developer is keeping the original game's emphasis on exploration, so expect multiple paths and rewards for taking the less obvious routes - something that was sadly lacking from the totally linear, but otherwise excellent, Tomb Raider: Legend.



Great PS3 Rope Format PS3 ETA March 2007 Pub Midway Dev Midway Studios Chicago

Stranglehold

Ⓜ Mafia Ⓞ Guns ✕ Tricks Ⓛ Tequila Time

This game is about one thing: wrecking the joint. Nearly every object on the screen can be smashed, destroyed or shot up. What's more, anything that lights up with a faint shimmer can be tricked off by your character – Hong Kong cop, Inspector Tequila.

Tequila can run up banisters, use food trolleys as skateboards and exploit the environment in imaginative ways to whip the crims. In the gameplay sequence shown here, Tequila enters an apparently peaceful tea house. Mafia guns start blazing and the place turns into a bullet-ridden, interactive playground for you to run wild in.

4

The Banister

Hit the star well and you can stride up the banister in graceful slow-motion. As Tequila runs the rail, perfectly balanced, it's a brilliant surprise attack to pick off badgers. Bankers can be slid down but that's just not as much fun any...

2

Use the humble trolley as a means of transporting desserts from kitchen to diner. Not Inspector Tequila. Bound up to it and you suddenly become death on wheels, a moving target with that added surprise bonus of... **It's been shot dead.**

3

Uplift the table with a... and Tequila's got a perfect, portable mini-barricade. Don't rely on it – like everything in Stranglehold, a few bullets and it's in pieces. Take a few shots, then keep moving.



! Next issue

We walk you through the terrorist-infested Bellagio Casino in Rainbow Six Vegas.



5

The slow

Tequila Time is Stranglehold's answer to bullet time, enabling you to dive through the air in slow motion. It's also the key to clearing chaotic scenes such as the teehouse. Instead of impeding Tequila's progress, tables become convenient surfaces to slide across, triggering brief Tequila Time moments that are perfect for avoiding enemy fire.

6

The grand finale. This Chinese light filling is both a work of art and an excellent way to wreak havoc from above. Hang one-handed and use it as a vantage point, or get it swinging on end and launch yourself across the gallery. It's on fire? Doesn't matter - that's just the way the Tequila rolls, baby.

1

The shootout

When Inspector Tequila first enters the tee house there's a brief, tense moment where he and the criminals size each other up. It's the calm before the storm though, as a slo-mo dive with twin pistols blazing starts the carnage.



Quick pitch Hard Boiled 2

It's the direct sequel to Hard Boiled, the action film that introduced bullet time and Chow Yun-Fat.

Woo?

John Woo, one of the most influential action-film directors of all time, is consulting on the game.

Hawk's with guns

Dive, jump and trick off your surroundings, creating flowing, acrobatic gunplay.



04

Preview



Ignore the floating numbers this is fast, live-action battling. Aaar.

Format PS2 ETA June Pub Sony Dev Level-5

Rogue Galaxy

△ Space ○ Pirates × Aaaaarr Bang

Mix Star Wars with Pirates Of The Caribbean and you get Rogue Galaxy. An action RPG that follows Jaster Rogue, an idealistic teenager trapped on a backwater desert planet controlled by an oppressive federation. Throw in two argumentative robots, a rakish space pirate plus a posh bird and you've basically got Episode IV: A New Hope - Manga remix.

Despite the odd blend of ideas it's far more accessible than your average Japanese RPG. The battles for example play like 'My First Devil May Cry' thanks to the colourful cel shading and Jaster's

lethal combination of sword and pistol attacks. It's ditched turn-based combat in favour of real-time fighting, leaving you free to run rings around your opponents - a mix of monsters, skeletons and insect-o-things. So you can nip in for a quick volley of blows before quickly dodging any reprisals. You can still freeze the action at any time though, to scroll through menus of potions and spells.

The randomly occurring battles are a total pain in the pirate booty, however, as opponents spring out of the ground constantly. The Action Gauge is similarly irritating. It's basically a stamina meter,



It's a space ship sailing through the stars. Aaaaarrrrr.

decreasing as you fight. When it's depleted you're forced to block until it recharges and you can attack again.

Bul these are minor drawbacks. Once Jaster meets his pirate friends you're free to set sail in your own space-faring frigate; exploring an enormous galaxy full of themed planets - jungles, industrial cites and so on. And the western version adds loads of new content to the already critically acclaimed Japanese edition. Including new cut-scenes, missions, locations and weapons. It's also by Level-5 who made last year's excellent 9/10 Dragon Quest.

5 good reasons Why Rogue could cure RPG phobia

1 Ignore everything
There's plenty of side quests involving bugs and weapon synthesis, and you can do as much or as little as you like

2 No turn-based fighting
While this means less control of your team, it does allow for a more immediate sword-battling experience

3 Save points
Save points also act as teleporters, which are handy for nipping back to the shops before a big battle to stock-up on all those essential items.

4 Skippable cut-scenes
Couldn't care less about why you need to get to the top of the waterfall? Just hit △ and you're back to running and fighting.

5 Dead easy map
A map at the bottom of the screen offers constant guidance, and if that doesn't help, the red arrow pointing towards your target should



T1 Next **Format** PS3 **ETA** March **Pub** EA **Dev** Black Box

Skate

△ Kicks ○ Tony × Hawk's □ Arse

This is an extreme sports Gran Turismo next to Tony Hawk's Burnout-style, knockabout fun. We're talking about animation so good, it's almost human, and NASA-grade physics that combine to create an incredibly believable world.

Skate features such an impressive level of detail that it makes Tony Hawk's look cartoonish by comparison. Simple touches like a skater's knees buckling as he lands a jump, or the impact of his foot as he pounds the floor to build speed adds an incredible amount of depth to the presentation. There are even subtle shifts in body mass and arm waving to

accompany sudden changes in direction. It's a more authentic style of skating, focusing on actual tricks performable by real human beings, rather than Hawk's oft impossible excesses.

A lo-fi, hand-cam-style, viewpoint lends extra credibility to the gameplay - it's as if the cameraman is skating along behind you. And you can also show off your special moves by replaying big tricks from different angles. The city itself looks like it's been cribbed from the real world. A bustling urban metropolis that replaces Hawk's ramp-crazy maps with the stairwells and handrails familiar to underground skating videos.

Game celebs



Danny Way

What he's famous for: Recovering from a list of injuries, including a broken neck, to jump the Great Wall of China on a skateboard

See him in action here tinyurl.com/7ybl3



Chris Cole

What he's famous for: Being skateboarding mag Thrasher's Skater of the Year 2005, and for pulling a 360 flip over the Wallenberg Big Four - a set of four very large stairs in San Francisco

See him in action here tinyurl.com/721stj



PJ Ladd

What he's famous for: Reclusive 12-hour solo skating sessions, phenomenal technique and a cult video called PJ Ladd's Wonderful, Horrible Life

See him in action here tinyurl.com/6zgm9

Can't Wait To Play...



Industry insiders reveal their PS3 faves

Matt Woodley Creative Director, Sega Europe

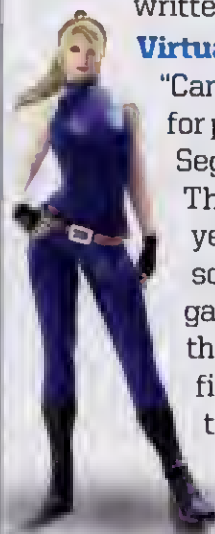
Brothers In Arms Hell's Highway

"The balance in the previous games of storytelling and intense gameplay seems to have been taken to an entirely new level in this latest offering. That, coupled with some of the best lighting tech I've seen, means this has 'must buy' written all over it."



Virtua Fighter 5

"Can you forgive me for putting one of Sega's games in?! The best graphics yet on PS3, and some subtle gameplay tweaks that take the fighting further than any of its competitors have so far done."

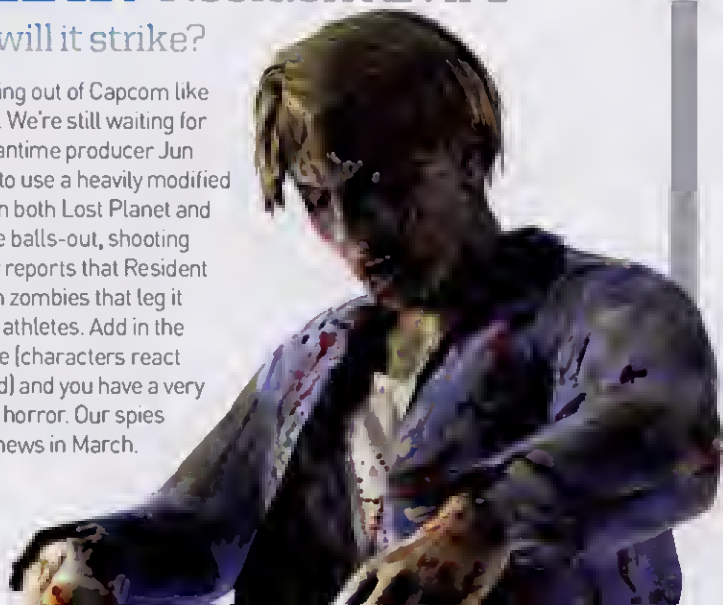


045

Where The Hell Is? Resident Evil 5

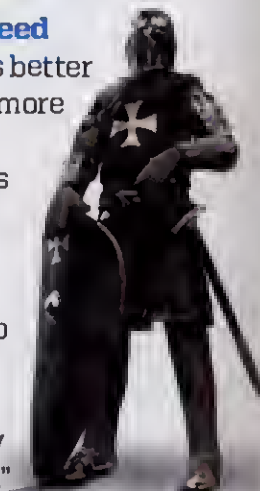
It's lurking, but when will it strike?

Reliable Resi news is currently dripping out of Capcom like blood from a very small flesh wound. We're still waiting for the full arterial geyser, but in the meantime producer Jun Takeuchi has revealed he's planning to use a heavily modified version of the graphics engine used in both Lost Planet and Dead Rising. As these two games are balls-out, shooting sprees, this may well confirm earlier reports that Resident Evil 5 will be more action-based: with zombies that leg it about like undead Eastern European athletes. Add in the much-reported atmospheric feature (characters react differently to extremes of hot and cold) and you have a very different addition to the first family of horror. Our spies within STARS tell us to expect more news in March.



Assassin's Creed

"This just looks better and better the more they show of it. The world looks alive - so evocative. I'm really hoping they manage to pull off the attention to detail that they are striving for."





Know your enemy
Online ID tags appear above each vehicle so you'll know who shunted you into a chasm.

EL CAPITAN

AXEL F

KING RUSHY

Wide load
Large vehicles are slow and handle like cruise ships, but they can take and give out plenty of punishment.

Iron horse
Fast, fragile and tricky to ride, bikes are perfect if you're looking for a high-speed, low-impact race.

PS4

BOOST TEMP

PS3 Exclusive **Format** PS3 **ETA** March 2007 **Pub** Sony **Dev** Evolution Studios

Motorstorm

⊕ Online ⊙ Multiplayer ⊗ Mud ⊕ Bath

Motorstorm has gone from 'dark horse' to 'must-have' in the space of a couple of months.

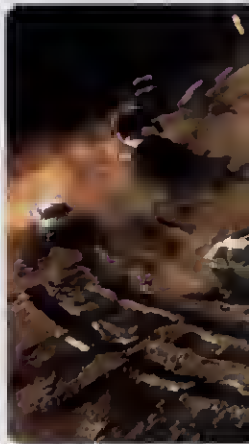
This flame-grilled off-road whopper features horrifically advanced crash physics, a jostling pack of filthy Mad Max-style vehicles and more multi-route madness than an unlicensed cab ride through Basra. Having caned and loved the single-player version, we wanted to find out what the online mode had to offer. Will the mud-spattered auto-carnage get the multiplayer workout it

deserves? The only way to be sure was to snatch the latest version from Evolution's grease-slicked hands.

Here's what we found: Motorstorm will ship with online racing that supports at least 12 players, but the team is aiming for 16. All the tracks and vehicles from the single-player mode will be available and users will be able to create their own custom events – as creative lead Paul Hollywood explains: "For the offline game, we've created 66 races that have been crafted around specific vehicles.

You go online and the permutations open up – you'll be able to choose *that* track and *those* vehicles – we may have never tried that combination ourselves, but people will be racing it online."

Naturally, players will be able to take on opponents from all over the world. There will also be ranked competitions for those (babies) who only want to play against motorists of similar capabilities. What the team seems most excited about, however, is the way in which the game's neat graphical quirks will



02:32

Dev talk



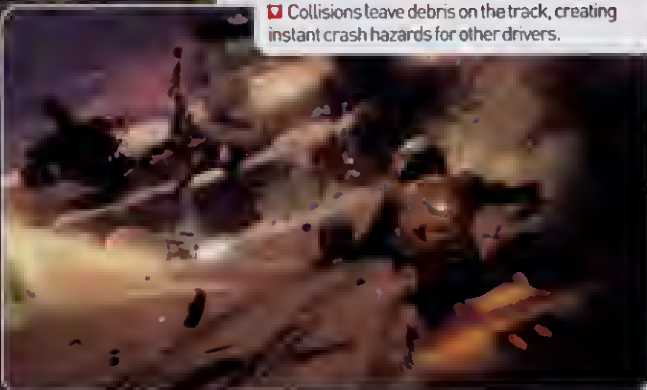
"We're looking to try new things with online... I want to do things the development team aren't even sure can be done."

Martin Kenwright
CEO and founder,
Evolution Studios

There will be class-specific online races, with all contenders in the same type of ride.



Collisions leave debris on the track, creating instant crash hazards for other drivers.



2 LAP / 3

08 POS / 15

Mud churns up during play, so your tyres lose grip and the course becomes more hazardous.



transfer to, and enhance, the multiplayer experience: "You'll see the taunts happening online," says Hollywood, referring to the fact that Motorstorm's drivers can be ordered to flip the bird at nearby rivals. "Also, you'll see the head movements. So when another player moves the camera around, the movement is reflected by their on-screen character. So if you're in a big rig coming up behind someone on a bike and they look back, you'll see their head moving... they know you're there. And in that second you know they're not looking where they're going..."

Downloads are also going to be a big part of the online deal. "The nice thing about downloadable content is that we can keep coming up with new ideas after actually shipping the game," says Hollywood. "We can see how people respond to the boxed copy and then go 'Well, what's the next thing we can add?' It's not just about extra tracks and extra vehicles..." He wouldn't be



Wish list

Novelty modes

Yep, expect plenty of these. One idea is to have a one-biker pitted against a whole army of trucks, sort of like the Assault situation mode in Counter Strike, where a single VIP must be protected against an army of snipers. There's also talk of the reverse scenario, with one player in a truck and the other on a bike.

Co-op mode

Currently there's no formal co-op feature, where players can team up with pals in a race; however, it supports in-game chat and, if relationships can develop. Apparently, a co-op mode is a possibility for the future.

Survival mode

A mode where vehicles aren't regenerated when they crash during a race won't be part of the initial Motorstorm experience, but the Evolution chaps like the idea and it could well turn up as a downloadable extra.

drawn on the specifics, but the studio has long-term plans for downloadable extras. There will be major stuff (new game modes, is a strong favourite) but also fun extras. Brilliantly, we've also heard whispers of new downloadable driver put-down gestures.

Clearly, there's a lot more going on here than simply providing an online space for gamers to race each other. Developer Evolution believes the Motorstorm experience will evolve as more gamers get involved and ask for new features. The boxed copy is just the beginning of the race; the finishing line, it would seem, is a long way off.

Preview



1 Recruitment day Past this bridge is a vitally important soldier we need to 'borrow.'



2 Infiltration Best sneak in, the enemy hate having their men nicked.



3 Ambush This one's got his own army fatigues. Excellent, he's hired. "Now, just smell this hanky."



4 Kidnapping Move your recruit quickly - you don't want to get caught.

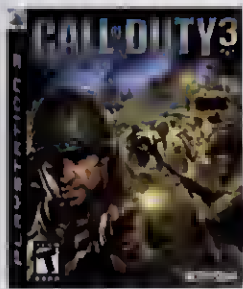


5 Capture Bundle him into the back of the truck and get the hell out of there.



6 Job done Once he wakes up you'll have a new squad member.

Pre-Orders The Amazon top three



Call Of Duty 3

The consistently excellent WW2 shooter loses none of its impact on PS3, with intense action and a brilliantly varied online multiplayer mode.

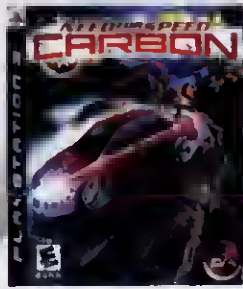
Format PS3 ETA Mar Pub Activision



Resistance: Fall Of Man

Mix a WW2 shooter with some hardcore aliens and you've got a whole new world of mayhem. This is the pick of the PS3 line-up

Format PS3 ETA Mar Pub Sony

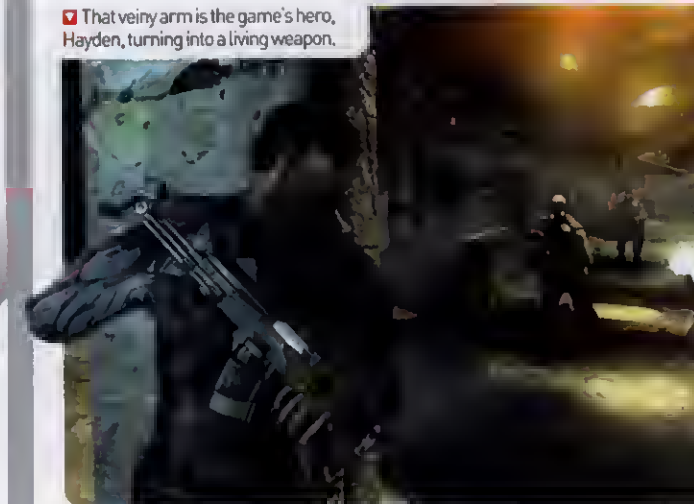


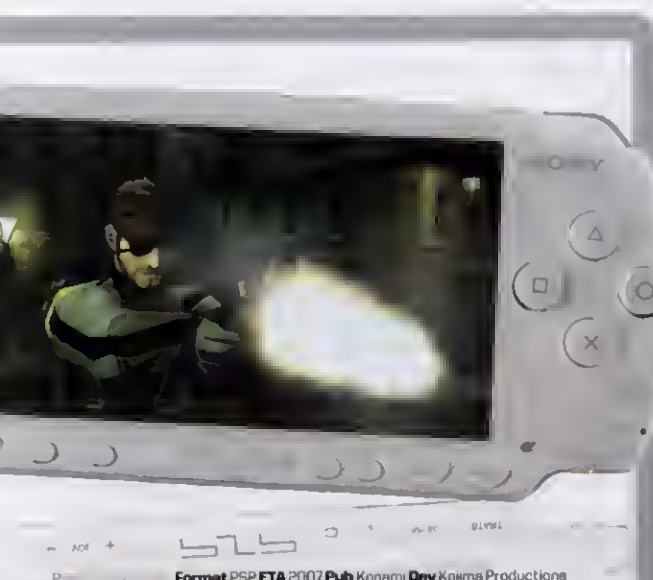
Need For Speed: Carbon

Roam the city looking for opponents, then take the challenge to lethal mountain roads in this free-roaming urban racer.

Format PS3 ETA Mar Pub EA

That veiny arm is the game's hero, Hayden, turning into a living weapon.





MGS Portable Ops

△ You're ○ My × Friend □ Now

You might think Big Boss is a lone soldier but for this PSP adventure he's bringing an army, made up of anyone he sets his remaining eye on. Recruitment varies: some join willingly and new characters can be downloaded via WiFi. But for most of the game you'll be clocking chumps on the back of the neck, dragging them to your truck and driving somewhere quiet for 'persuasion'. You then tackle the third-person stealth missions as a team, so make sure you get a good mix of skills – healing medics, disguise-wearing spies or weapons-savvy grunts for example. You can also use your squad for online multiplayer battles. But there's a twist. If someone dies then they're properly dead; lost forever. Leaving you with nothing but fond memories of chloroform and a gently fading struggle. So it's a good job that you can raise an in-game white flag and surrender – swallowing your pride but keeping a near-to-death soldier alive to fight again.

Hype Meter: **Format** PS3 **ETA** Autumn **Pub** 03 **Publisher** Dev **Dev** Digital Extremes

Dark Sector

△ Russia ○ Assassins × Shuriken □ Virus

Anything you already know about Dark Sector is wrong. Unveiled almost three years ago, the early footage saw a commando in a morphing suit stalking the corridors of a ship, drifting through the galaxy. Here's the latest news: Dark Sector has ditched space and come crashing back down to Earth. Happily, the changes are a vast improvement. The game is now set in a crumbling, post-apocalyptic future, populated by fetishist, gas mask-wearing

But Reaction

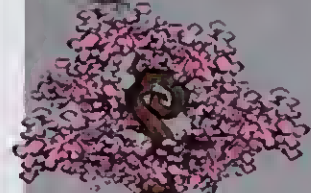
What's strong and what's wrong



Blacksite: Area 51
The first play reveals gritty realistic alien and incredible next-gen visuals. A big step up from the PS2 clichés of the original.



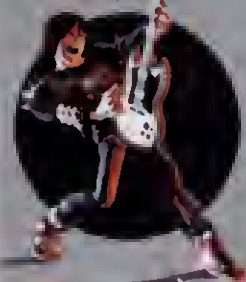
Mercenaries II
The PS3 version of this free-roaming gun-for-hire adventure is absolutely amazing.



Okami
A beautiful original and captivating adventure that everyone should try.



Vin Diesel's not Hitman
Ain't it a shame that Vin Diesel didn't get a big-screen role in the wood. Turn why Sly didn't want to be playing the cueball.



Guitar Hero II tracklist
Sure, the game's brilliant, but the song list isn't quite as much fun as the original.

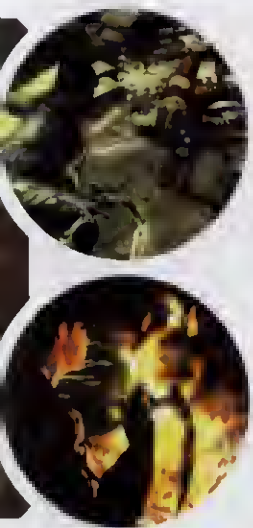
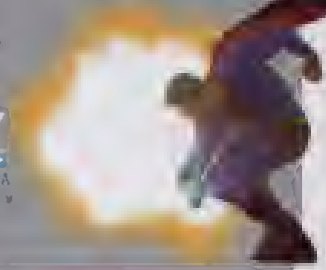


Plugging stuff into PS3
Should be easy, plug in device, play out of it. It's not. It's confusing and messy. Next, firmware update, much easier.



Launch stories
Slave labour, rubbery shooting, that sort of thing. Ain't it a great mad for PS3!

Superman Returns
LA held it back to make it better. Here's a textual example of a terrible movie review.



When knives don't work, guns are a handy backup.
pops from his hand like Wolverine's claws. Use it at close-quarters, throw it like a shuriken missile, or explore its special properties. Heat the weapon in the remains of a burning vehicle, for instance, and it becomes a Fire Glaive, with flame-spitting powers. Handy.

Preview

Mixing oriental and western fantasy themes this is a combat-fuelled tale of death and revenge.

Rivals



Devil May Cry 4 (PS3, 2007)

Stylish, challenging fighting action as you slice and shoot your way through a world of demonic enemies.



Ninja Gaiden Sigma (PS3, 2007)

Word-based combat as you use speed and blade skills to fight demons and ninjas.

Platform: PS3 | Format: PS3 | ETA: March | Publisher: Sony | Developer: Ninja Theory

Heavenly Sword

⊙ Swords ⊙ Sorcery ⊗ Gods ⊕ Scissor Kicks

It begins with the end. The flame-haired heroine Nariko falls, lifeless, at the feet of her enemy's soldiers. The divine sword that has granted her unbelievable power – while draining the life from her body – finally devours her spirit entirely. She dies. But, while Heavenly Sword begins with death, this is

really a game about life and what you choose to do with it. It's a Conan The Barbarian-style fantasy-adventure that tells its tale in flashbacks; recounting Nariko's choice to take up a legendary magical weapon, knowing it will ultimately kill her, so she can avenge her murdered family.

The irony is that while the Heavenly Sword is a tool of bloody retribution, it's also the cause of the tragedy. It is a legendary weapon forged for a god, and guarded by Nariko's father and a ragged band of followers. But, over the years, their numbers have dwindled. So when the deranged King Bohan decides the

Quick pitch

Massacre

Nariko, the only survivor of a slaughtered cult, sets out to kill the king behind the murder.

Martial arts

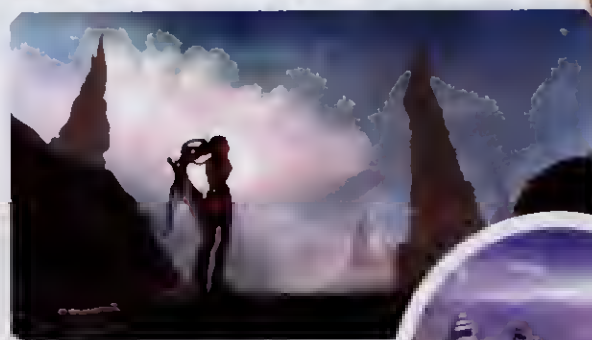
Mix up multiple fighting styles with aerial combos, counters and mini-game special kills.

DOA

The story begins with Nariko's death and then relives the events that lead to her demise.



▣ Spinning her swords around on chains enables Nariko to keep multiple enemies at bay.



▣ Forget this arty shot above, and check out Nariko's hand cannon on the far right.

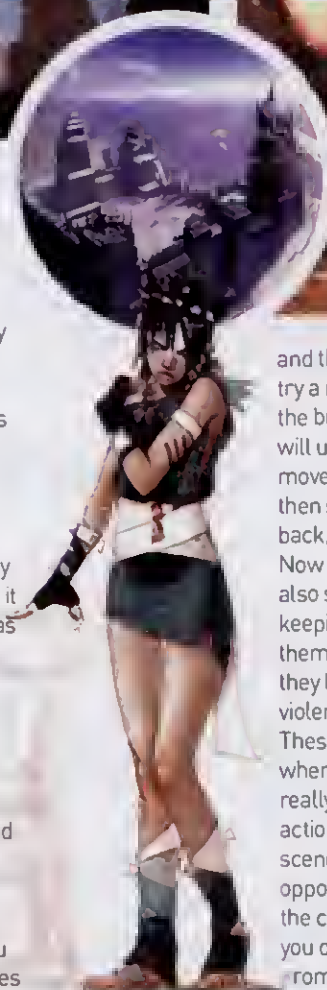


mixes the choreography of martial arts films with the relentlessly pressured battles of Devil May Cry. The result is flowing sequences of balletic swordplay and cinematic special moves. Nariko slices her way through everything from modest skirmishes to entire battlefields full of soldiers in her quest to reach the murderous monarch.

Blades of gory

Central to the bloodshed is the Heavenly Sword itself. Rather than a single blade it comes in three configurations, known as stances (see Sword Play over the page for more), each offering a different fighting style. The stances can then be blended together on the fly to defeat different types of opponents.

This basic mix of attacks is just the start. Developer Ninja Theory has added extra layers to the combat that will hopefully prevent the game falling into the classic trap of combo-led button-mashing. Countering moves enable you to effortlessly deflect onrushing enemies



and their clumsy assaults, but you can try a more stylish manoeuvre by piling on the button combos. Get it right and you will utterly humiliate an opponent. In one move, you can kick your attacker away then spike 'em on your sword, yank 'em back, and roundhouse 'em in the spuds. Now that's how to win a fight. You can also smack a foe into the air, then play keepie up with their rag doll – slapping them as many times as possible before they land. On top of all that inventive violence, come the Hero sequences. These set-piece battles are triggered when you go head-to-head against a really nasty piece of work. Suddenly the action cuts to a breathtaking combat scene that's pure eye candy. You and your opponent fight an almighty duel, while the camera soars around the action, and you drive it by matching on-screen button prompts, just like in God Of War. These ▶

blade will strengthen his power, the beleaguered tribe can offer little resistance to his army. With her loved ones dead or dying at her feet, Nariko picks up the relic to fight back. A choice that seals her fate – within hours of grasping the handle, she'll be dead.

But impending death focuses Nariko's will like a lens. For gamers this means an experience centred on pure combat. Forget exploration, platforming or puzzles, this one is about frenetic fighting. The story unfolds in chapters, following Nariko as she battles to carry out her mission. It's an experience that

Sword play

Power stance

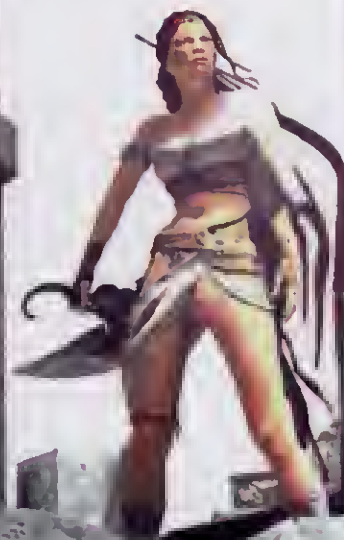
The Heavenly Sword has three configurations: the first is a huge but slow blade, capable of splitting shields and breaking through most defences

Speed stance

This creates two smaller, faster hatchet-like blades. The most versatile style, enabling Nariko to perform varied but weaker combos.

Range stance

Good for group work. Chains extend the twin blades' reach, so Nariko can whirl the weapon to hold off gangs of attackers.



▲ Enemies can be knocked skywards for an airborne beating.

Hero sequences really do highlight the beauty of the combat system. In one scene, the camera pulls away to show Nariko and a guard boss running up the side of a pillar. They break into a dizzying series of pirouettes and leaps, clashing repeatedly in mid-air, while bouncing impossibly off the crumbling walls and columns around them. The sequence climaxes hundreds of feet in the air, with Nariko delivering a final, fatal, blow before her face fills the screen and she falls away, landing elegantly on the ground below. Even during regular combat the camera swoops and soars around Nariko as she performs, and there are some subtle touches of slow

motion to highlight particularly flashy moves. All this slaying enables you to collect 'style points' like a bloodthirsty Tesco shopper. Cash in your points for Superstyle Moves that slice up multiple enemies. You can also upgrade your ass-kicking skills and can replay unlocked levels with your new moves.

Little smasher

Heavenly Sword does a nice line in interactive, destructible environments (the new 'big thing' on PS3). Tables and furniture smash, bottles break – it's a great demonstration of the machine's ability to create realistic objects and then utterly destroy them. Not that the

devastation is just for show. Nariko can use this battle junk to her advantage: whipping up clouds of debris to drive back opponents. Even more impressive is her ability to throw objects with lethal accuracy. Plates, swords and dead bodies can become deadly missiles. When you throw something, the camera follows the missile through the air, and you can steer it using an aftertouch control system. It's great fun to chuck a shield and make it take out several enemies, bouncing from head to head.



▣ Nariko's chain blades make her a formidable opponent at long range.

Serkis performer

While Nariko is undoubtedly the star she's got a great supporting cast to work with.

Cast list Heavenly Sword's troupe of freaks, weirdos and friends



Roach

King Bohan's sadistic and illegitimate son. He's devoted to his father despite being constantly shunned by him.

King Bohan

A deranged leader who thinks he's been sent from heaven. Covets the power of the Heavenly Sword above all else.

Whiptail

A self-made monster who's into body modification and cannibalism. She's literally King Bohan's favourite bit of tail.

Kai

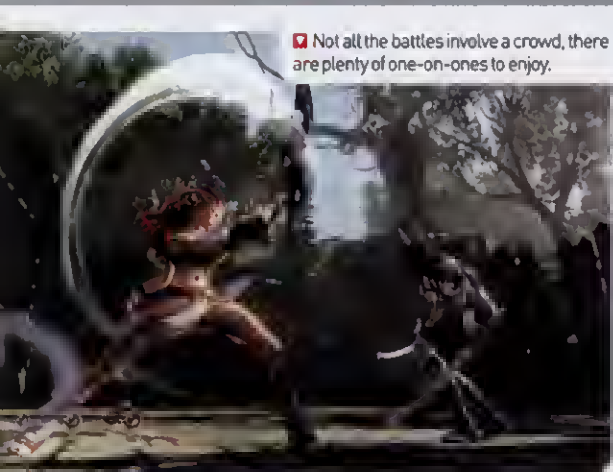
Nariko's adopted little sister and the only survivor of another massacred clan. Uses a pump action crossbow.

Shen

Nariko's father and the leader of the clan protecting the Heavenly Sword. Murdered by King Bohan for the blade.

Flying Fox

A lethal, aerial kung fu expert who's mainly employed by Bohan to prevent him taking his skills elsewhere.



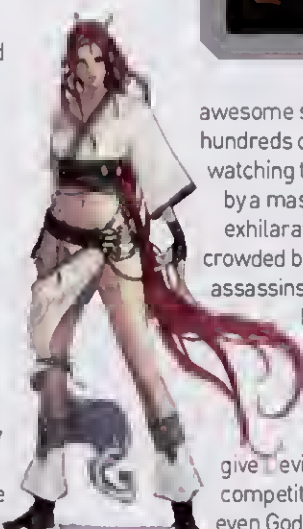
Not all the battles involve a crowd, there are plenty of one-on-ones to enjoy.



Every soldier is beautifully animated, shouting and taunting as they fight. They're bright enemies too, using group AI to coordinate and attack as a team.

But the impressive performances turned in by the digital cast are not something that the developers can take absolute credit for. Ninja Theory got an expert involved in the shape of actor Andy Serkis. Having brought uncanny life to the CGI characters King Kong and Gollum (The Lord Of The Rings), Serkis was called in to share his expertise in creating believable, computer-generated characters. It's been worth the money, too, as the actor turns in an impressively menacing performance as King Bohan, the evil king responsible for murdering Nariko's family. Serkis also apparently ran his professional eye over the other performances to make the entire game cast more believable, and consulted on script and character development.

Heavenly Sword still has a few more surprises up its sleeve. Like a dirty great bazooka (as the developer's call it). Okay, it's not exactly in keeping with the fantasy silverware but Nariko's hand cannon packs the right kind of punch when entire armies need to be eliminated. It's an



awesome sight when PS3 generates hundreds of soldiers on screen, but watching their bodies thrown into the air by a massive explosion is even more exhilarating. In direct contrast to the crowded battlefields are the King's assassins – a highly trained group of killers who stretch Nariko's skills in a series of boss battle showdowns.

Heavenly Sword's stunning combat is going to give Devil May Cry 4 some serious competition on PS3 and it looks like even God Of War will have to sweat

hard to match Nariko's combat skills. Watching her in action is an incredible spectacle as she disposes of her enemies with effortless grace. This confident next-gen take on the hack-'em-up shows exactly how the power of PS3 can make a big difference to a familiar genre. The entire experience benefits from a mass of beautifully honed details, from the acting, to the extravagantly animated fight sequences to the impressive camera flying flawlessly around the action. Nariko's time on Earth might be limited, but it looks like she's going to live every second to the full.

Death is not the end

Nariko's not the only game character to come back from the grave.

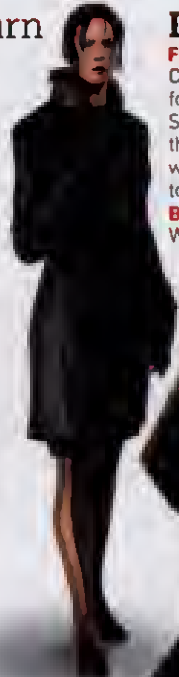
- 1 God Of War starts with Kratos throwing himself to his death from a cliff. Fortunately the power of flashback means the game doesn't actually end there.
- 2 Halfway Through Fahrenheit, Lucas Kane dies, but that doesn't stop him going on to get laid, saving the world and having a baby. Definitely one lucky siff.
- 3 You spend all of Ico trying to rescue Yorda, then she goes and gets killed at the end. Only to come back as a shadow, save you, die again and then come back for a third and final time.
- 4 It takes persistence to kill a Sim in The Sims 2 but it's possible. Not only do you get to haunt people, but you can challenge Death to a bidding contest to get another chance at life.
- 5 In Metal Gear Solid 3, Snake can eat a fake suicide pill to escape a cell. Behind the 'Game Over' screen you're able to equip an antidote, return to life and escape while the door's left open.



PlayStation Icon **Format** PS3 **ETA** 2007 **Pub** Konami **Dev** Kojima Productions

Metal Gear Solid 4

△ Friends ○ And × Foe □ Return



Dr Naomi Hunter

Friend Or Foe?

Chief geneticist at FoxHound (Snake's special forces unit), Hunter may well have caused Solid Snake's genetic decay, as she infected him with the lethal FoxDie virus in Metal Gear Solid and was shown telling him he has only six months to live in an early MGS4 trailer.

Big Secret

Wants Snake dead for killing her Dad, Gray Fox.



Solid Snake

The Main Man

The true hero of Metal Gear, Snake is an incredibly skilled stealth operative, adept at infiltrating hostile, supposedly impenetrable locations. Now freelance, but formerly a member of elite US Special Ops group FoxHound, Snake has a habit of retiring after every harrowing mission and so, over the course of the series, has had more returns than a Glastonbury fish burrito.

Big Secret

Solid Snake is a clone of Big Boss – a legendary Cold War super soldier and the anti-hero of MGS3. Snake also has two clone brothers: Solidus Snake (killed in MGS2), and Liquid Snake (believed dead, but still alive, incredibly. See Liquid Ocelot). Tragically, Solid Snake's unstable clone DNA is causing him to age at terrifying speed – a major plot twist in Metal Gear Solid 4.

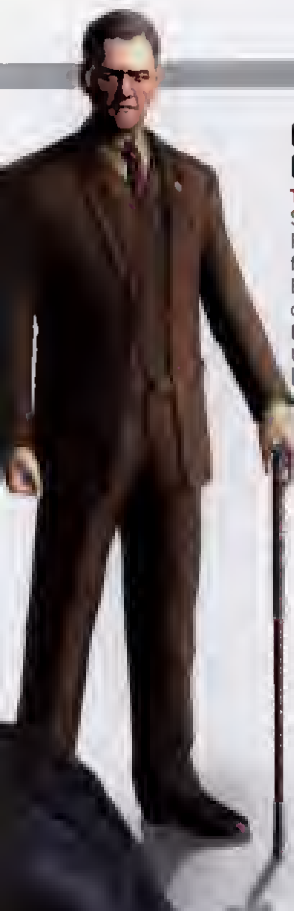
Meryl Silverburgh

The Old Flame

In between all the sneaking about and government-sanctioned homicide, Meryl is the closest Snake has ever come to a love interest. AWOL in MGS2, she's back as a skilled FoxHound op.

Big Secret

Meryl is Colonel Campbell's daughter, although that was only revealed if you let Snake submit to torture in Metal Gear Solid.



Colonel Roy Campbell

The Veteran

Snake's former commander at FoxHound and originally a good friend of Snake's ONA 'dad', Big Boss. The MGS2 Campbell turned out to be a complex computer AI, but the real man returns in MGS4 to bring Snake out of retirement (again), to defeat Liquid Ocelot.

Big Secret

Commanded 'Pipo Snake' in Ape Escape 3 mini-game, Metal Gear Solid: Snake Escape.



Otacon AKA Hal Emmerich

The Brains

Otacon is Snake's best friend and boffin back-up. He designs and produces Snake's hi-tech gear, including the new OctoCam suit, and briefs Snake in MGS4 using the robot drone, Metal Gear MK.II.

Big Secret Hal's private life is a mess. He was seduced by his stepmother, provoking his dad to drown himself, and almost kill his stepsister Emma. This has nothing to do with MGS4, but it qualifies Hal for a guest slot on Jeremy Kyle.

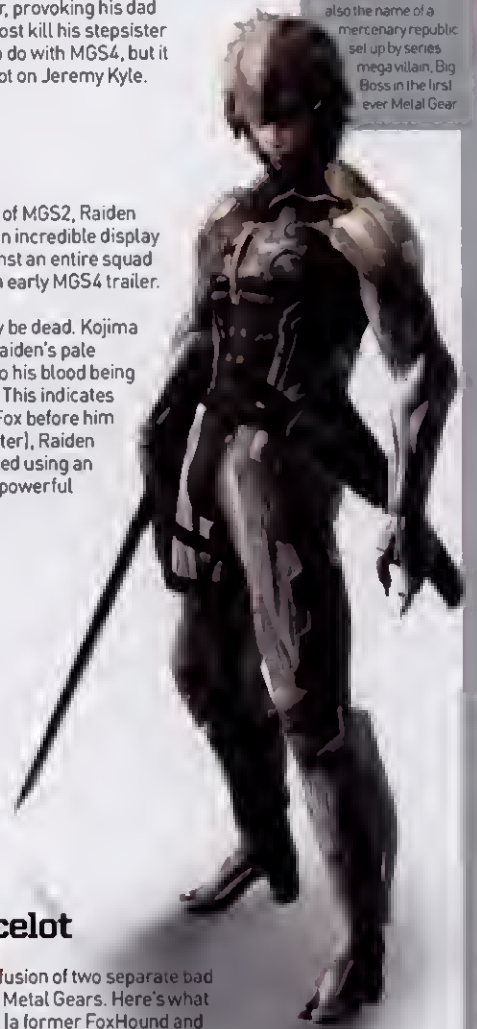
Raiden

Rookie Reborn

The unpopular star of MGS2, Raiden has returned with an incredible display of sword work against an entire squad of Metal Gears in an early MGS4 trailer.

Big Secret

Raiden may already be dead. Kojima has revealed that Raiden's pale complexion is due to his blood being white and artificial. This indicates that, just like Gray Fox before him (See Or Naomi Hunter), Raiden has been resurrected using an exoskeleton as the powerful Cyborg Ninja.



Liquid Ocelot

The Bad Guy(s)

Liquid Ocelot is a fusion of two separate bad guys from earlier Metal Gears. Here's what happened: Ocelot (a former FoxHound and flamboyant revolver-toting combat virtuoso) was defeated in MGS when his right arm was severed. A replacement limb, 'sourced' from Liquid Snake (Solid's clone brother), was attached in time for MGS2. However, Liquid's personality came with the limb and now dominates Ocelot's body entirely.

Big Secret

Liquid Ocelot controls the world's five largest private military companies, and is up to no good.



Did you know?

In MGS4, Liquid Ocelot runs a military super corporation called Outer Heaven whose private armies operate throughout the world. It just so happens that Outer Heaven is also the name of a mercenary republic set up by series mega villain, Big Boss in the first ever Metal Gear.

The hook Why it's time to get excited

Series creator, Hideo Kojima, has laid out some tasty plot bait this time. We already know that Solid Snake will die. He's ageing at an accelerated rate, and his strength is failing. But Kojima loves to surprise his fans, so we doubt all is as it seems. Especially as Snake is caught in the middle of a full-scale war, playing off the opposing factions against each other, and benefiting from the chameleon powers of his new OctoCam suit.



The new Metal Gears are 'living' cyborg tanks.



Snake is plunged into deadly urban warfare.



Metal Gears can sprint, climb and squash.

by Mattelton Icon **Format** PS3 **ETA** March **Pub** Sony **Dev** SCE Studios Santa Monica

God Of War II

Ⓐ Same Ⓞ Again? ✕ Sounds Ⓟ Magic

The first God Of War was a granite milestone in the history of PS2. Its blend of deliciously crunchy combos, flashy spellcasting, and sunlight-blocking beasts ripped straight from Greek mythology made it an instant classic. It was always going to be tough to improve on for the sequel. "So... I was thinking... more of the same, maybe?"

That's not to say there aren't new elements to GOWII - they're just applied with subtlety. The combat and magic systems are now more closely integrated, meaning your character, Kratos - a former mortal, now defending his role as the titular God Of War - can now link together even more devastating attack sequences. Thrill as he slashes an enemy with blades, flings him skyward, unleashes a string of shots from a bow and arrow, then catches him in another flurry of steel as he hits the floor. And you're going to need these new tricks because the bosses that roam God Of War II are some of the most despicable creatures ever to spring from the ancient texts. Present are a slug-tailed gorgon, the tri-muzzled Cerberus, and a hammer-wielding Barbarian King who you may recall kicked all hell out of Kratos in the original (see right).

Also new is an underwater level that sees Kratos swimming through a waterlogged underground complex, and a scene that finds you battling off

3

Swing
Give the King a kicking. You'll know he's beat when he drops his war mallet. At which point you can make use of it.

2

Horseplay
First, deal with the steed. Dobbin here should provide enough horsemeat to feed a pack of Cerberus.

1

Barbarian King
You may remember killing this dude in the first game. Hades brought him back to life... only bigger.

enemies from the back of an airborne griffin. Meanwhile, the death animations are more flamboyant and gruesome than ever. Case in point: Kratos pushes a Minotaur's sword into the ground, hooks the beast with his twin chains, and slowly impales him on his own weapon. Of course you don't *have* to whisper, 'Does it hurt? It does, doesn't it?' at the screen. That's entirely optional.



4

Get hammered
And a few bashes later, back he goes to Hades, with a few extra indentations. The mallet is now yours to keep.

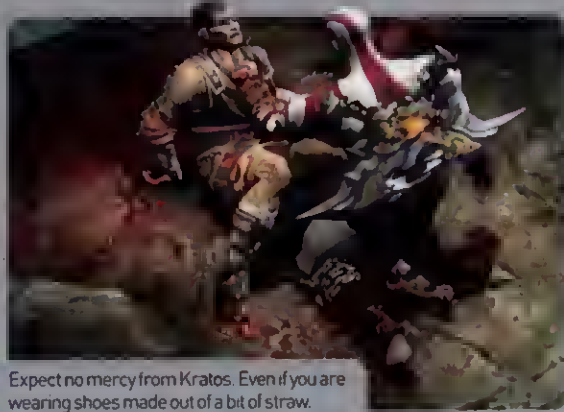
Finish him Kratos has learnt some gruesome new kill moves



Swing from Cyclops' eyeball like it's a fleshy chandelier. Leg up for leverage, then pull. Hear that popping sound.



Griffins: they might be mythical creatures, but even they can't fly with a wing ripped off.



Expect no mercy from Kratos. Even if you are wearing shoes made out of a bit of straw.

Each gun battle involves a fight to secure the safest strategic areas.



PlayStation 3 In: **Format** PS3 **ETA** March **Pub** EA **Dev** EA **LA**

Medal Of Honor: Airborne

△ Jump ○ Land × Shoot □ Kill

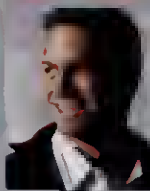
Dropping out of the heavens in March (February on PS2), the latest Medal of Honor shooter is taking an intriguing new approach to EA's iconic WW2 FPS. As Private Boyd Travers, of the 82nd Airborne Division, players parachute in behind enemy lines, hitting Fritz with an authentic range of fully customisable guns. Yep, true to WW2 soldiers' practice of upgrading weapons with scavenged components, new bits including bigger magazines, better grips and grenade launchers can be found during battle.

Airborne's big hook is that you can choose your own landing points, touching down far from the action for a sneak about, or belly flopping right into the lap of an unsuspecting stormtrooper on his strudel break. The open-ended approach to missions is meant to create more freeform, player-led battlefield conditions, but there

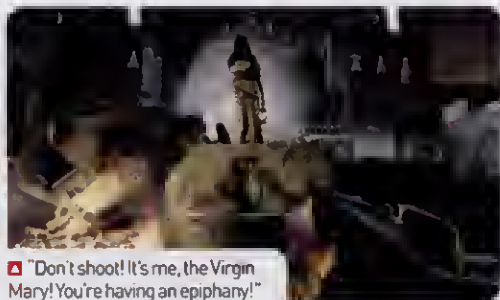
seems to be some reluctance on EA's part to actually show that bit working, so we'll have to reserve judgement. We can't help thinking it just means there will be two or three routes to the same battle instead of just one, but we'd love to be proved wrong.

Either way, EA is going to have to pull something major out of the knapsack to match the glorious Call Of Duty 3.

Dev talk



"The fact that you can land and start anywhere, means that we couldn't fall back on linear design."
Patrick Gilmore
Executive Producer



□ "Don't shoot! It's me, the Virgin Mary! You're having an epiphany!"

Prequels Previous medallists



Medal Of Honor (PS1, 1999)

The opening shot in the MOH series follows Lt Jimmy Patterson, rookie recruit to the Office of Strategic Services, blasting Nazis behind enemy lines as the allied forces build up for D-Day. The accurate weapons, detailed locations and mix of stealth and jung-ho action elements dazzled PS1 owners



MOH: Rising Sun (PS2, 2003)

The glitchy visuals and poor AI provide much sterner resistance than the Japanese in this disappointing excursion to the Far East. Here, the lead role goes to Marine Corporal Joseph Griffin, blasted into unrelentingly linear action by the attack on Pearl Harbour. At least it was historically accurate



MOH: European Assault (PS2, 2005)

A return to form for the series as Lt William Holt battles through France and North Africa on a range of classified missions. Great at visuals, open-ended gameplay and squad-based elements bring things bang up to date. There's even a script by Apocalypse Now writer John Milius. But no online mode

Could Be A Contender

Lord Of The Rings: The White Council



It's just been announced but it sounds like a winner

The premise

Wander Middle-earth on some jaunty old quests, 100 years before all that nasty Ring business. Eventually you face Sauron in his pre-gigantic-flaming-eye days as the big, bad, Necromancer of Dol Guldur.

The reality

An original Rings RPG with a new combat system that should mean as much slash 'n' bash as relic hoarding and problem solving.

The hook

Custom build a hero and enhance their skills with new weapons, allegiances and mini-games.

The inspiration

It's Oblivion dusted with Hollywood gold, so we're hoping for an immersive adventure that'll have us all forgetting to go to work.

The chances

EA have done a pretty decent job with previous Ring games and now they've got the book rights too.

Format PS3 **ETA** 2007 **Pub** EA **Dev** EA **Res** EA **Revised** EA **Original**

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The Latest On...

New shots, new games, new info



Hellboy

Format PS3 ETA 2007 Pub Konami

Demon hero Hellboy battles Nazi head-in-a-jar Herman von Klempt. Helping him is the Right Hand Of Doom – an oversized stone mitt – so scarlet-fisted face pounding should feature prominently.



Haze

Format PS3 ETA 2007 Pub Ubisoft

New info has recently appeared at mantelglobalindustries.com, a stark business site for Mantel Corp, the private military company featured in the shooter. We're told they deal in avionics, health, weapons, and TV!



Harker

Format PS3 ETA 2008 Pub/Dev The Collective

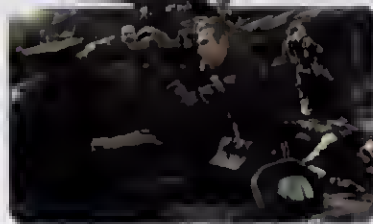
Sucking the life from Bram Stoker's Dracula, this recasts narrator Jonathan Harker as a kick-ass slayer. Out for revenge after Drac chomps his missus, he battles vamps 'blessed' with superhuman healing powers.



Mobile Suit Gundam: Crossfire

Format PS3 ETA 2007 Pub Bandai

All-out war in customisable giant robotic suits. Current word from Japan suggests this one is more rusted scrap than gleaming chrome.



Killzone 2

Format PS3 ETA 2007 Pub Sony

Downloadable chapters will follow the main release, according to a Dutch interview with the dev team. Budgeted at £11 million, it's now Holland's most expensive multimedia project ever.



Genji: Days Of The Blade

Format PS3 ETA March Pub Sony

Now on sale in Japan (to average reviews) the last character has been revealed as Lord Buson, the Japanese god of war who has inhabited the body of spear-wielding bad guy Kagekiyo.

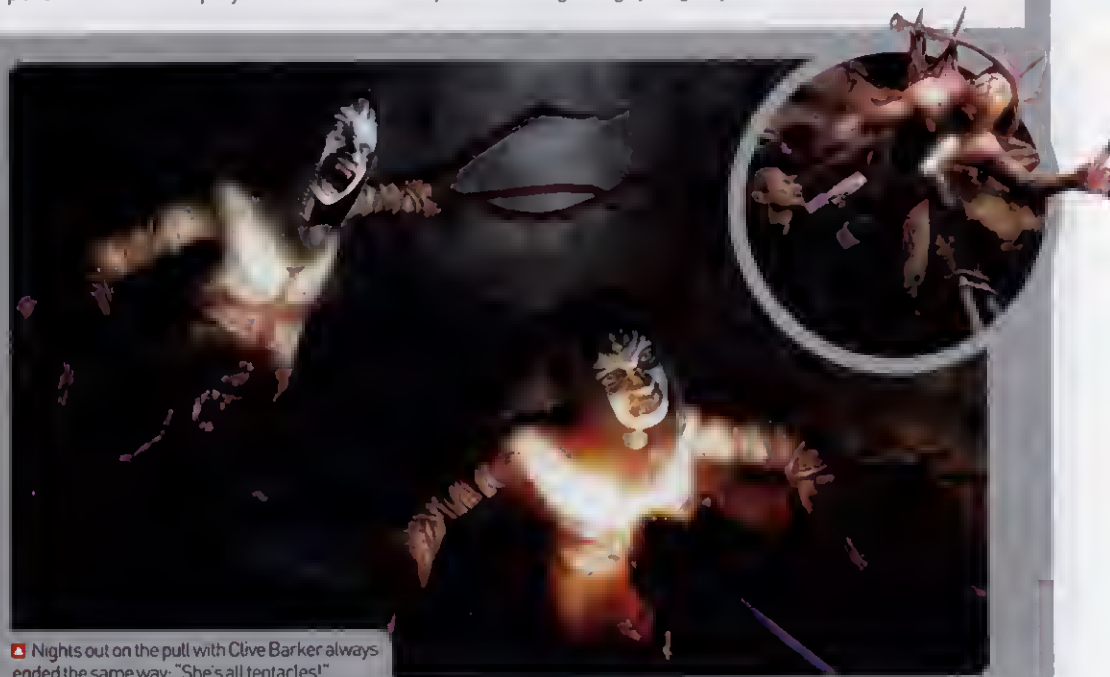
There's more...

Eyidentify is a PS3 game in development that will use both the headset and HD camera to direct two female agents. Blitz Games is working on **Possession**, in which you're the leader of zombie hordes intent on infecting innocent bystanders. Online options are promised, as well as plenty of gore. Move spin-offs go next-gen as **Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles** is announced for PS3, along with **Harry Potter And The Order Of The Phoenix**. Expect Quidditch matches to utilize the Sixaxis. Following in the wake of Sega's **Yakuza**, Capcom has announced it's throwing its hat into the Yakuza adventure ring with **Shinjuku Wolf**, in which you play a detective solving crimes in Tokyo's Shinjuku ward. **Fighting Fantasy**, based on the popular dice-and-decisions game books, will be a series of titles on PSP. EA has announced **Burnout Dominator** for PS2 and PSP in 2007, with more bruising racing and insane events to test fans of the series and win some new ones. If you like your gameplay with less petrol and more sea salt, try some adventure and brain-taxing strategy on PSP with **Sid Meier's Pirates!**

Clive Barker's Jericho

ETA 2007 Pub Codemasters Dev MercurySteam

A lost city reappears in the desert, and *surprise*, it's just crawling with evil. As a member of a spooky special forces team, you must clean out the Hellraiser-style flesh gimps and other beasties, using a cleansing cocktail of automatic weaponry and paranormal powers. Think *Rainbow 666*.



☑ Nights out on the pull with Clive Barker always ended the same way: "She's all tentacles!"

UK FIRST REVIEW

FINAL FANTASY XII

The **final word** on the biggest game of the year

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feature

Resistance: Fall Of Man



Join The Resistance Or Die

It's humanity versus aliens in **Resistance: Fall Of Man** PS3's must-have shooter. Arm yourself for the fight for Earth with our definitive guide to the alien menace



ince



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The Chimeran threat

The alien invaders will kill, but would rather turn you into one of their own

1 Crawlers

These alien virus carriers are the Chimerans' primary method of infecting humans. They deploy in locust-like swarms from Spires – gigantic shard-like projectiles that are launched into our major cities. Crawlers enter humans via the nearest orifice and inject their virus before dying. The victim will fall into a coma and suffer a major genetic attack. Mutation into one of several horrific alien soldier species inevitably follows.

2 Leaper Pod

If a Crawler fails to infect a human it enters an interim evolutionary stage. When these clusters of boil-like pupae detect human warmth they burst open, releasing ferocious Leapers. Leaper pods should be treated like organic proximity mines and blasted with grenades on sight.

3 Leaper

Leaper Pods hatch to release aggressive, dog-sized Leapers. Leapers savage any nearby target using their knife-like claws, teeth and prehensile tail attack. The Hailstorm rifle's automated fire mode is the recommended human response to the threat. A new strain of Leaper has also recently been identified. Called the Roller, it barrels towards its prey before spewing a blinding toxic jet into the eyes.

Leapers are dumb but fast and incredibly vicious.

Chimeran strains

Know your foe: the regular soldiers of the alien army

1 Menials

Alien drones designed to staff the Chimeran conversion centres where humans undergo the agonising process of mutation. The Menials are also responsible for maintaining the invaders' wider base infrastructure. Do not underestimate them; while Menials are slow-witted, they move stealthily and have very sharp teeth.

2 Steelhead

Regular Hybrid formations are reinforced by smaller numbers of these armour-plated mutations. They are tougher, better armed (with the devastating Auger cannon), and more intelligent. Steelheads are capable of using cover and splitting into tactical attack groups.

Mutation!

The Chimera don't take prisoners – they turn them into alien scum.

3 Hybrid/ Advanced Hybrid

The basic Chimeran grunt is cowardly and stupid. They attack in groups and will soak up a lot of fire before dying. A tougher strain has been reported defending Chimeran bases. Their metabolism-regulating coolant packs are their weak point. ▶



Chimeran strains [cont]

4 Hardfang

The heavily armoured Hardfang is engineered with no instinct for self-preservation. It will make a suicidal charge until its target is destroyed or it has been eliminated. Use the sniper rifle to neutralise this threat.

5 Titan

The Titan demonstrates the physical limits of the human body once infected by the Chimeran virus. Larger and stronger than a man, the Titan's thick hide is impervious to small arms fire. Like most Chimera, its weakness is its overworked metabolism: destroy a Titan's coolant system and it'll explode in a shower of raw meat.

Mutation!

The Chimera don't take prisoners - they turn them into alien scum.

6 Slipskull

If you're painted by the red dot of a laser sight then it means a Slipskull is in the vicinity. This shadow-dwelling alien will take the unwary by surprise with its fast leaping movements and ability to cling to walls and ceilings. An irritation on its own, Slipskulls present a formidable danger when encountered in packs.

Super Chimera

Advanced strains of the alien menace

1 Howler

Named for its blood-chilling call that can be heard for miles, the Howler has an almost canine appearance. It is immensely powerful and its thick hide is impervious to all light arms fire except blasts from the Rossmore 236 tactical shotgun. Its single attack mode is a high-speed charge followed by animal mauling with teeth and claws.



Howler Amidies attack beast.

2 Carrier

A towering squid-like organism that's sole purpose is to collect fallen humans who are infected by the alien virus, and deposit them at the nearest Chimeran conversion centre. It is here that the final form of Chimera that the human will become is decided. Carriers do not engage in combat and are all but invulnerable to standard issue weapons.



Carrier Its tentacles harvest infected humans

3 Widowmaker

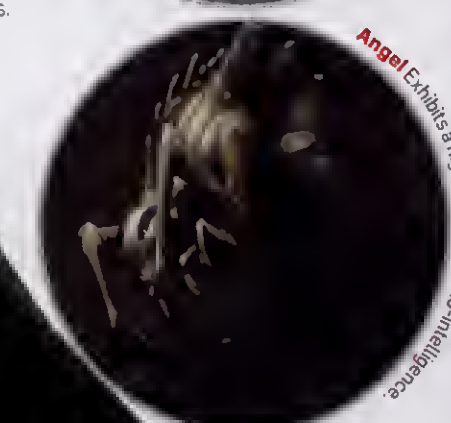
This house-sized, insect-like behemoth is often seen leading Chimera attacks and appears to boost the morale of the other strains of alien. The Widowmaker uses its barbed limbs to kill as well as spewing explosive bio-mines, similar to those used by the Sapper rifle.



Widowmaker Gigantic, terrifying and smart

4 Angel

Only recently identified by the Resistance, the Angel appears to have a command function at the top of the Chimeran hierarchy. It doesn't participate in battle directly, but is crucial in organising any concerted Chimeran attack on the human forces.



Angel Exhibits a higher form of xenos-intelligence.

7 Gray Jack

When the common Chimeran foot soldier (the Hybrid) nears the end of its lifespan, it evolves into a final stage: the grotesquely misshapen Gray Jack.

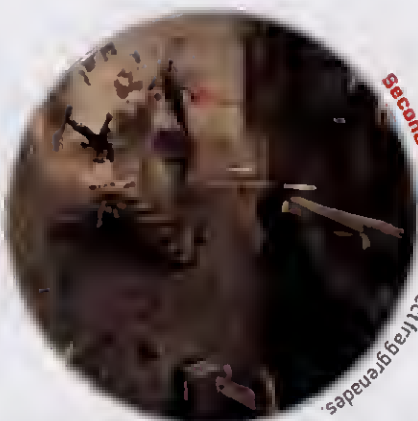
These lanky creatures may look slightly comical but their foul, decomposing stench, lolling run and long, claw-tipped reach make them tough opponents in a tight corner.

Guns of the Resistance

By using the best of human *and* Chimeran weapons technology, humanity can still turn back the alien invader



Primary Fire Rapid-fire assault rifle mode



Secondary Fire Area-effect frag grenades

1 M5A2 Folsom Carbine

The standard issue weapon is a rapid-firing automatic rifle that combines superb accuracy and stopping power with readily available ammunition. The underslung M200 40mm grenade launcher provides a high-explosive and area-effect option for armoured and multiple targets.

Rough and ready

The M5A2 is a fine example of the 1950's Earth technology that humanity has at its disposal during its hour of most urgent need. Primitive but still surprisingly effective.



Grenade launcher

Carries three rounds at a time. Enough to decimate a sizable wave of Chimeran grunts.

2 Bullseye/Bullseye Mark II

The Chimeran trooper's standard weapon has a similar feel and fire rate to the M5A2, but differs in one crucial, brilliant respect. The Bullseye's secondary mode launches homing tags that attract fire no matter which direction the barrel is facing. Use it to tag a Chimeran, duck behind cover and still keep it under fire. The Bullseye Mark II features increased stopping power.



Primary Regular fire packs a hefty punch



Secondary Fire homes in on tagged enemies



Homing bullets

The Bullseye's special tag rounds make the rest of that clip home in on the 'painted' target.

Ammo loading

Note the low eight-round capacity when using the Rossmore to engage multiple targets in close combat.



Primary A single barrel will stop a Howler.

Secondary Both barrels will kill it dead.

3 Rossmore 236

This tactical shotgun is ideal for close-quarters combat in Chimeran tunnels and bunker networks. It is only effective at short range but its powerful discharge makes it the only small arm capable of stopping a Howler charge. Secondary fire discharges both barrels for maximum killing power.



4 Auger

The Chimeran energy rifle fires a powerful bolt that can penetrate solid obstacles. It renders cover useless and is best-suited for targeting hidden enemy. The velocity and force of the bolt increases with every target it penetrates. Secondary fire creates a defensive plasma net that blocks non-Augers attacks.

Primary Fires clean through solid objects.

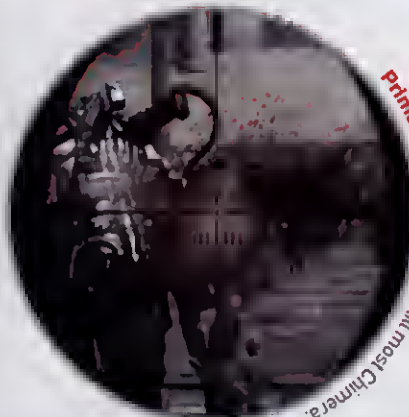
Secondary Plasma net stops virtually all enemy fire.



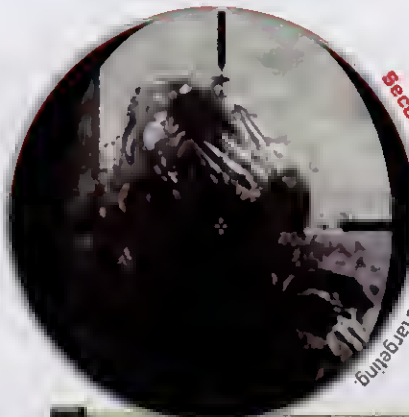
Power pack

The Bullseye Mark II has a different, blue power cell that boosts ammunition to near one-shot-kill capability.

The guns [cont]



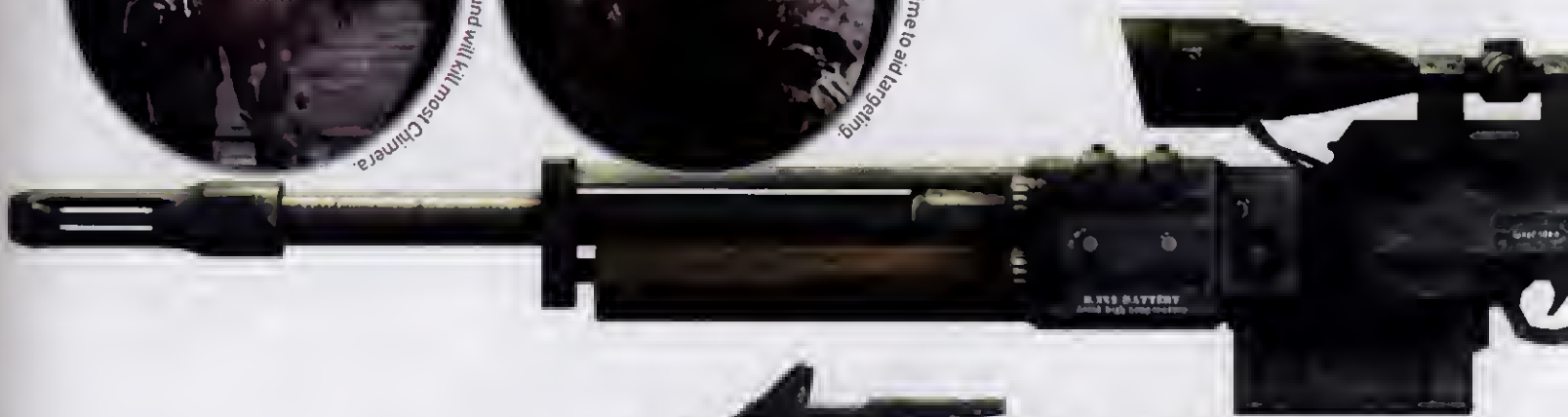
Primary A single round will kill most Chimeras.



Secondary Slows time to aid targeting.

5 L23 Fareye

A sniper rifle of human design – favoured by the Royal Marine Commandos – the Fareye is an unrivalled precision instrument. It enables operators to target individual Chimerans from long distance using the sniper scope, but is restricted by its single-shot ammo capacity.



6 XR-003 Sapper

The alien Sapper fires a stream of organic sticky mines that adhere to any surface. Proximity detonates the rounds but they can also be triggered manually with the secondary fire. The Sapper's range is poor, but it's a superb booby-trap weapon; particularly effective against Slipskulls as rounds stick to walls and ceilings.



Firing mechanism
The LAARK is well regarded for its high rate of missile fire.



Primary Fires organic sticky mines.



Secondary Detonates sticky mines from a distance.



Rapid-fire capability
The Hailstorm consumes ammunition at lightning speed.



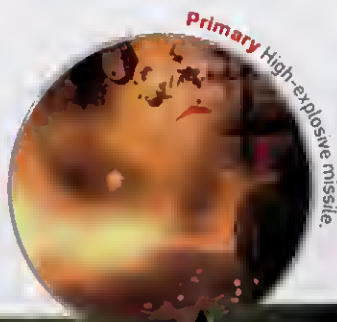
7 XR-005 Hailstorm

The Hailstorm fires huge quantities of plasma rounds at an incredible rate of fire. The subsonic ammo will then ricochet for angled kills around corners. Secondary fire releases a hovering minigun drone, capable of 360° coverage. By switching weapons the operator may use the drone to lay down fire from two positions simultaneously.



8 L209 LAARK

The LAARK or Light Anti Armour Rocket is the only weapon heavy enough to bring down a Stalker with a single, well-placed, armour-piercing round. Secondary fire launches a hover missile, that may be temporarily slowed or stopped in flight, to enable re-aiming against a moving target.



Grenade tactics

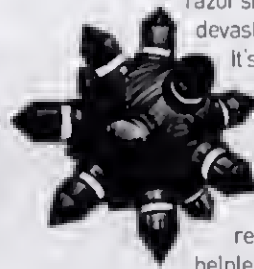
Fling and forget

Frag grenade



This standard-issue British army pineapple comes with a fizzing fuse that releases a choking cloud of acrid smoke before detonation. This deters even the most suicidal Chimeran from picking it up and launching it back at the thrower's feet.

Hedgehog grenade



On detonation the Hedgehog spews out razor sharp spines in a devastating 360° sweep.

It's a horribly effective close-quarters projectile from the Chimeran army: the hog spines have even been reported to pin enemies helplessly to nearby walls.

Air-fuel grenade

This devastating area-effect weapon releases a fine mist of fuel into the air before igniting it and napalming every living thing in a sizable vicinity. There is nothing more effective at clearing a room crawling with Chimera.



Backlash grenade

An inspired weapon that provides formidable defensive as well as offensive capability against the Chimera. On detonation, the Backlash creates a protective plasma dome that is impervious to any Chimeran weapon while enabling the user to fire out. Crucially, the Backlash redirects enemy fire back on its source, effectively doubling its potency. ▶



Human vehicles

Your backup in the fight for survival

1 U/AV-17 Hawk/P-117 Kingfisher

The Hawk is a versatile VTOL (Vertical Take-Off and Landing) troop carrier. Its freedom from landing strips makes it superb for inserting members of the human Resistance into enemy-held territory. The Kingfisher is a British variant of the US Hawk and equally nimble.

VTOL capable

Hawk and Kingfisher gunships are a key part of humanity's armoury, performing vital reinforcement and rescue missions under the most hostile of battlefield conditions.



The Hawk is a regular sight in the skies above

2 M-12 Sabertooth

The Sabertooth is the Resistance's best armoured vehicle and the only option for deep strike missions into Chimeran-held territory. The tank's 80mm cannon will destroy a Stalker in two hits and the 20mm Gatling gun is used to lay down suppressive fire against Hybrids. Tank-driving experience is available for new recruits upon joining the Resistance.

Chimeran vehicles

Hostile alien armour

Reverse engineered
Stolen alien technology is highly prized by the Resistance, and Stalkers are particularly vulnerable to enterprising human soldiers.

Payload

In addition to troop transport, the Hawk is powerful enough to airlift a Sabertooth tank straight into combat.

Mission support

Resistance infantry are also fully trained to adopt Lynx gunner positions when required.

1 Stalker

This multi-terrain, heavy war machine is rightly feared by the human Resistance due to its intimidating weapons loadout including anti-aircraft gun, missile pod and anti-personnel gun. Note: the partially exposed, rear-mounted power core is a key design weakness.



True scale

Image shows height comparison between human and alien Goliath.

3 LU-P Lynx

Equipped with a 12.7mm machine gun fixed to its vibration-dampened 360° turret, and combining superb agility and stability, the all-terrain Lynx is the British army's light transport of choice. Swapping between the turret and driving seat is an option whether you have a companion or not.

2 Goliath

Terrifying in appearance and capabilities, this gigantic siege tank is used to infect whole populations with the Chimeran virus. The Goliath first pounds targets with mortar fire then launches its Spires (missiles packed with thousands of virus-ridden crawlers). But do not lose hope. Reports of a single soldier destroying a Goliath with a stolen Stalker may yet be confirmed. ▶

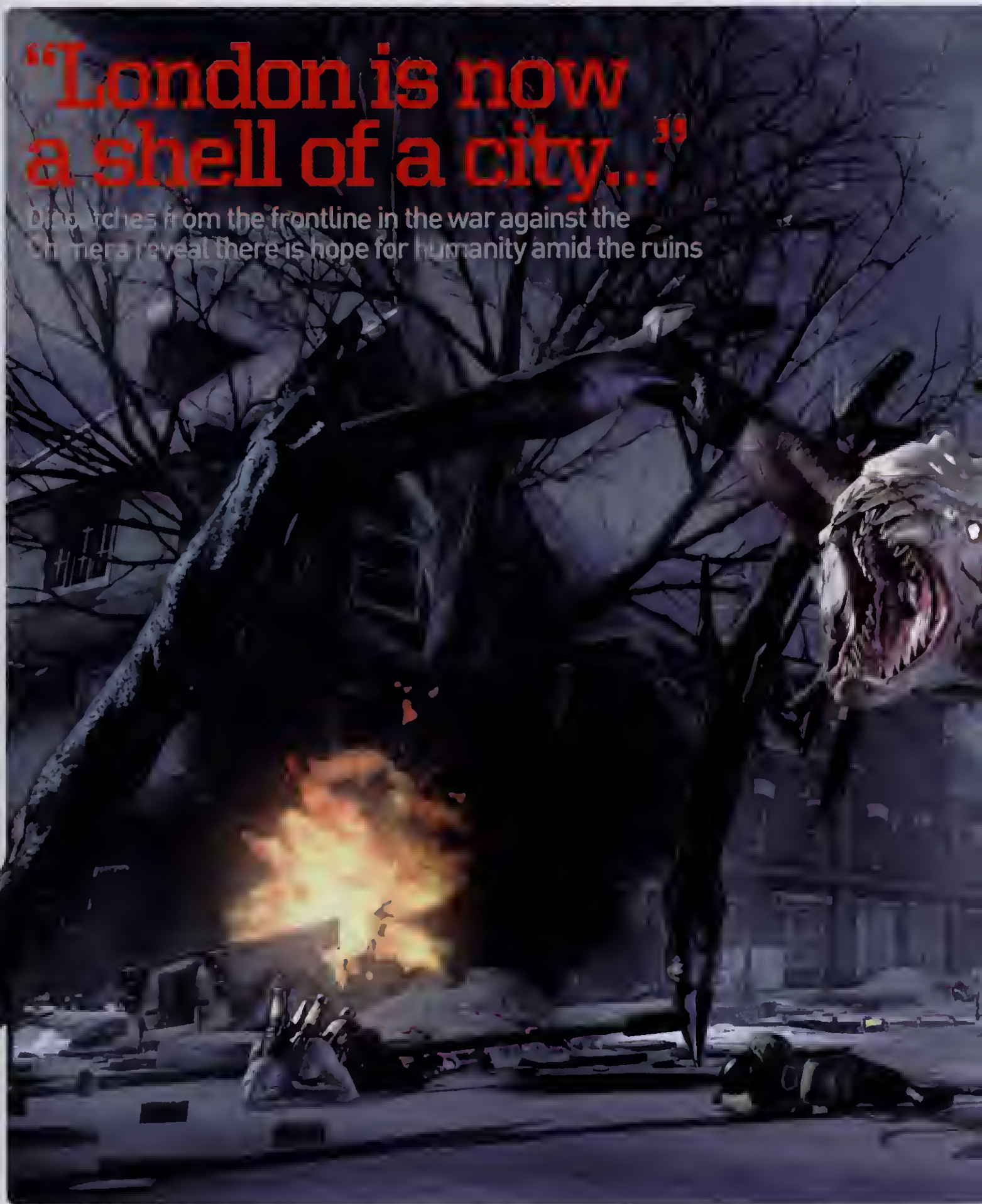
feature

Resistance: Fall Of Man

"London is now a shell of a city..."

Dispatches from the frontline in the war against the Chimera reveal there is hope for humanity amid the ruins

PS
072



Towards the Chimeran tower

"Long since deserted by its population, London is now a shell of a city – rendered utterly desolate by Chimeran structures straddling its familiar landmarks. A Sabertooth tank awaited up ahead but I almost died before I could reach it, when a terrifying alien Widowmaker caught me in open ground. Equipped as I was with a powerful rocket launcher, it still took three direct hits to cripple and then kill the creature. Once in the Sabertooth, I made faster progress.

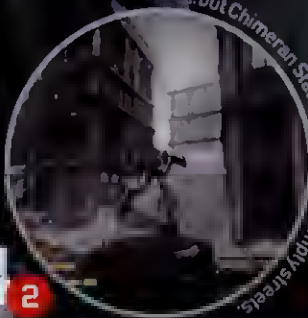
Rounding on Trafalgar Square I was confronted by a trio of Stalkers plus concentrated fire from clusters of Steelheads dotting the terraces and hidden in the rooftops. Ironically the Stalkers proved easier to destroy than the soldiers. The alien machines can traverse most terrain, but they are big and slow – the Sabertooth's cannon soon silenced them. But the Steelheads kept firing with devastating accuracy – a tactic that almost crippled my tank entirely before I could pick off the last stragglers in the shadow of the National Gallery. My relief was short-lived. Reports now suggest there are Goliaths up ahead. If that is true, the Sabertooth's bulk will make it a liability. Let's hope I can commandeer something smaller and faster, and get some backup. I don't fancy tackling a Goliath on foot, and alone..."

PS
073



The heart of London is deserted.

1



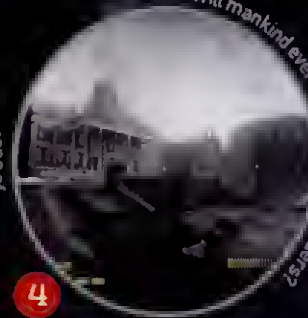
...but Chimeran Stalkers patrol the empty streets.

2



Trafalgar Square is the scene of a hellish firefight.

3



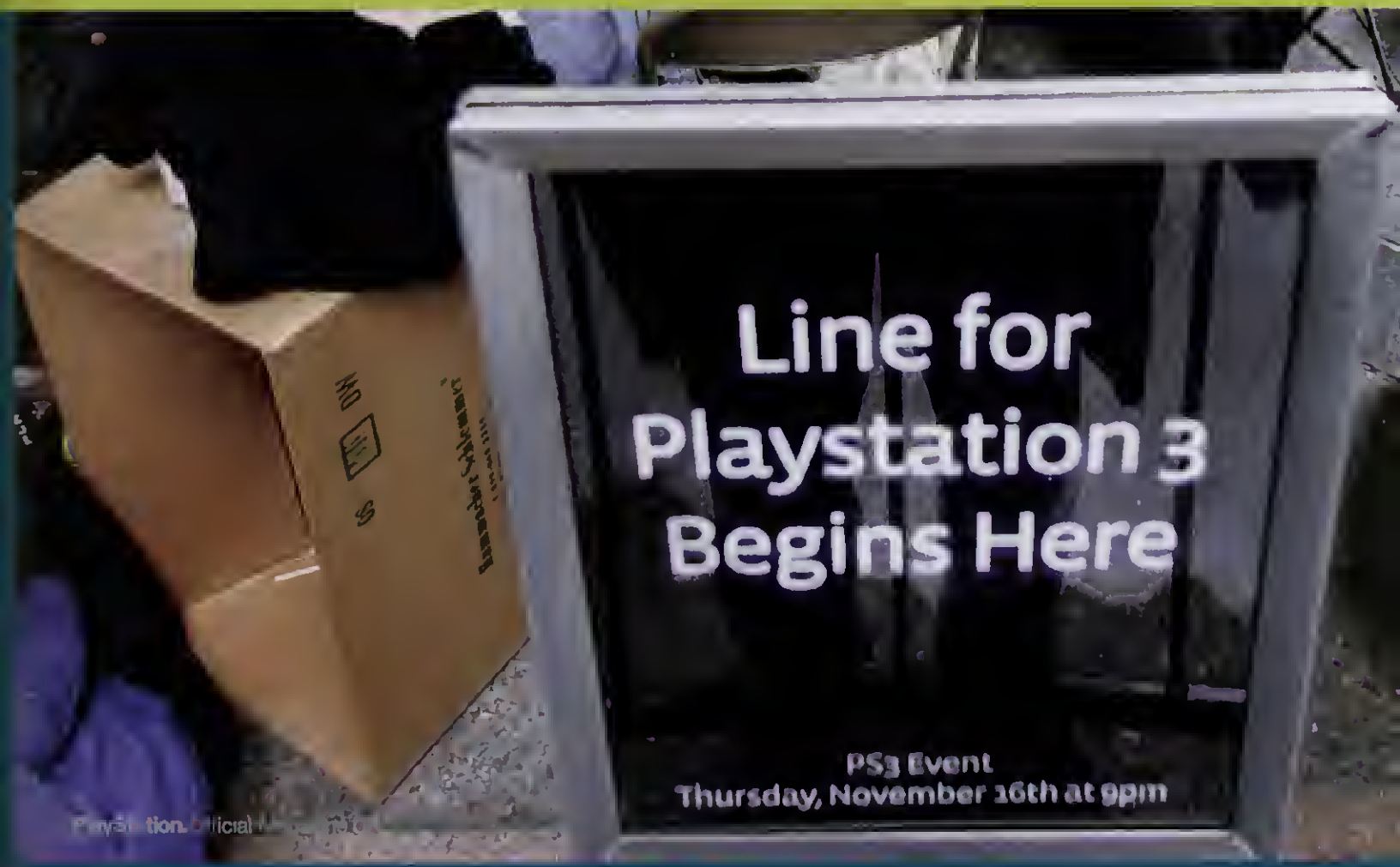
Will mankind ever defeat the alien invaders?

4

report
Launch day madness

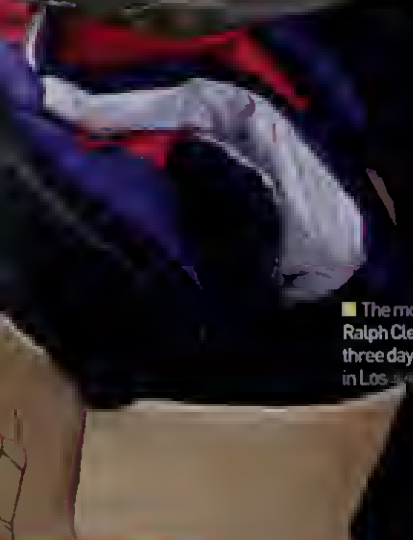


Gamers in folding chairs and sleeping bags sit outside Sony Style Plaza in New York, 15 November 2006, as they wait in line for PlayStation 3 to go on sale at midnight, 16 November 2006.



Line for
Playstation 3
Begins Here

PS3 Event
Thursday, November 16th at 9pm



■ The moment of triumph. Ralph Cleary waited in line for three days at a Best Buy shop in Los Angeles for his PS3.

Launch day madness

While the PS3 launch was predictably well-mannered in Japan, midnight shop openings in the US swiftly descended into chaos

West Bend, Wisconsin, America. It's 7am on 17 November and a crowd of more than 50 people shuffle nervously in a Wal-Mart car park, eyeing the ten plastic chairs lined up in front of the store, about 20ft away. Everyone knows the rules: the first ten people to sit in the chairs after the signal get a PS3. Everyone else goes home empty-handed. It's tense. There isn't much chatter. Then, suddenly, someone shouts 'Go!'

A week earlier, in Japan, the launch of PS3 was far more tame. Most queues didn't form until less than 24 hours before the machine was due to go on sale, thanks to a lack of pre-launch advertising from Sony. Many shops, with no idea how many units to expect in their allocation, chose to run a lottery system and dish out machines randomly rather than encourage queuing.

The only stores that saw serious queuing were in Tokyo's electronic Akihabara district, and even there many people didn't arrive until as late

as midnight Friday, with machines due to go on sale at 7am the next day. At Laox AsoBtCity, the crowd was cheerful, with cosplayers mingling and posing for snaps.

In fact, it wasn't until early morning that the first signs of stress started to show. The 1,500 'lucky' shoppers who'd been issued with tickets and herded into an underground car park at electronic giant Yodobashi Camera, started to shove as the people at the back began to fret about being given a 20GB unit. At 7am Ken Kutaragi turned up in the pouring rain to talk to the first customer to buy a machine who couldn't respond, because he was Chinese. And so, the Japanese launch of PS3 was marked by light drizzle and polite booing.

Happy campers

Over in the States the first queue-monkeys were sighted setting up tents and sleeping bags on Monday, 6 November (12 days early). One Burbank maniac proudly claimed - on televised news - that he'd called in sick from work for two weeks to join the queue. He then upped the ante by telling reporters he'd postponed his engagement and planned to spend his ring money on games.

Others were better organised, turning up with DVD players, HDTVs and 360s to make the wait as comfortable as possible. They were promptly ejected by their local Best Buy when the manager noticed whose power they were leaching. Meanwhile, two ▶



report

Launch day madness

▶ GameStop employees came up with the most crazy plan of the launch, calling police to claim that "masked gunmen" had taken four systems from their Elm Grove store. Police concluded that the staff's story was "inconsistent with a robbery" and charged the pair with embezzlement and filing a false police report.

Dying to get a PS3

More criminal activity – this time serious – occurred in Putnam, Connecticut. At around 3am, 13 people were queuing outside their local Wal-Mart when two masked men approached. Brandishing sawn-off shotguns, they demanded cash from the first two in the queue and got 75 cents. Michael Penkala, the third in line, knew he wasn't going to get off so lightly. Calling 911 and dropping his phone into his pocket, he struggled with the muggers – unwilling to give up the \$2,600 in cash he was carrying – and took a smack in the face.

Eventually the robbers ran, but one turned and fired at Penkala, hitting him in the chest and shoulder. He was carried into the mall where he asked staff to give his wallet to the three friends he'd paid \$75 dollars apiece to wait in line with him. All three bagged PS3s and Penkala was given one free by Wal-Mart. The robbers – one 17 the other 20 – have been caught and charged with attempted murder, and could spend up to 20 years in prison.

Meanwhile, back at West Bend, the PS3 race quickly got out of hand. Mike Dooley, assistant manager of the Wal-Mart has since denied trying to set up a gladiatorial party game, claiming: "The chairs were put outside for the convenience of the shoppers" and that there "was no race". Unfortunately for him, video footage suggests otherwise, clearly showing a mob of excited videogame fans sprinting for the store after a prompt from a member of staff. The sickening highlight? It's possible to make out customer Craig Weston being shoved, face-first, into a metal flagpole, which left him with a separated jaw (see p.79). "I was running flat out," explains Weston, who's considering suing.



Only in America

A State-by-State breakdown of the worst of the PS3 launch...

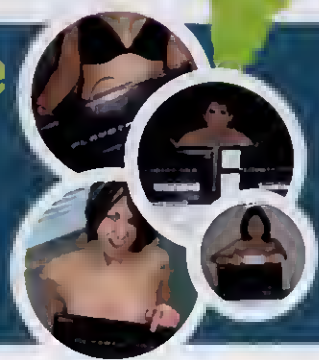


Meanwhile...



Cyberspace launch

PS3s appeared on eBay within hours of launch



Look but don't touch

Hundreds of people posted pictures of themselves with their PS3s to prove that they had one to sell – and, inevitably, several chose to appear naked.



Grilling joke

One seller listed a grilled cheese sandwich, promising to include a PS3 'if the winning bid is more than \$10,000'. Unbelievably, the winning bid was \$202.50 – so no PS3 and an inedible sandwich.



Babies for PS3s Twin Cities, Minnesota

KDWB chat-show host Dave Ryan offers callers the chance to win a PS3 in exchange for 'borrowing' their baby for 24 hours. More than a dozen listeners respond, and one lady known only as 'Katie' rings again after the hoax is revealed, asking "So, does that mean I don't get my PS3?" No, dumbass.



Mayor blames Sony for riot Boston, Massachusetts

500 angry customers pile inside Copley Plaza's Sony store at 5am in the morning, trampling each other, breaking the escalators and getting arrested. Boston Mayor Thomas Menino blames Sony for not supplying enough security, and states his intention to fine them for incitement to rioting.



Battery not included White Marsh, Maryland

At 10pm Best Buy staff announce to a crowd of more than 50 people that they've only got 35 units for sale. In the resulting fracas, the shop shutters are pulled down, police pull batons, and two people end up arrested and charged with battery of a police officer.



Drive-by shooting Lexington, Kentucky

Three campers are hit by a hail of BB gun pellets fired from a moving car as they're being interviewed by a female TV reporter. Nobody loses an eye, but police begin considering round-the-clock protection for the vulnerable PS3 queuers.



Waiting for fun Austin, Texas

A girl known only as 'Casey' made it onto local news channel, News 8, claiming she 'doesn't know anything about PS3' but is queuing up for PS3 because she 'heard it would be fun'. It's okay, though - other line dwellers gave her gloves, a hat and tent to protect against the bitter weather. Similarly ill-prepared queuers were unavailable for comment, because they all had hypothermia.



Dentist queues the easy way Columbus, Georgia

Non-gamer Dr Murray Newlin hires more than 60 temp workers to queue in shifts, hoping to pick up 15 consoles for his nieces and nephews. The plan is estimated to cost him upwards of \$20,000, but he abandons it after angry shoppers complain to the employment agency he's using. If only he'd used... needless people like everyone else...



\$0.99

Going cheap

'Kusakay' queued up for 40 hours, blew \$600 on his machine... then messed it up by listing it with a 'Buy it now!' price of \$0.99. Tragically, he even offered to throw in NBA 2K7 and Tony Hawk's.



It's not real

People posted cleverly worded auctions designed to make it sound like they were selling PS3s - they weren't. Favourites included, 'Please note this is a picture of a PS3', and a man selling three PS1s. But the king of idiots was a man who paid \$1,100 to obtain 'contact information' for someone who might sell him a PS3.

Logging out

One seller claimed he'd made it into PS3-bagging position by... slipping Ex-Lax into his queue-mates' coffee and watching security drag the squits-ridden 'nerds' away. Oisgraceful behaviour.



PS3 launch in pictures

America's most dedicated PlayStation punters get snapped



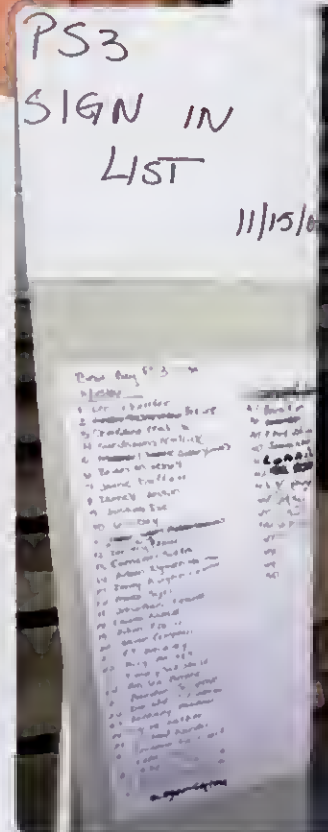
First in the line at Best Buy, I saw Ralph Cleary get to his four-year-old daughter.

AP Photo/Sae E. Hong



■ Sergio Rodriguez celebrates as he's first to reach the checkout to buy a PS3 at a Circuit City store in Manhattan's Union Square. How long had he been going near-mad in the queue though?

AP Photo/Jason DeCrow



AP Photo/Chris Gardner

■ Your name has to be on the list to be on the list you want to get your hands on PS3 at this Best Buy store in Baltimore

Queue tips

When the UK queues start, learn from the guys in the States

Sleeping bag

If you seriously want to get a PS3 on day one, you'll be spending your nights sleeping outside the shop.

Umbrella

March will be wet and cold, so don't forget to take one of these to keep you dry.

Folding chair

Unless you want deep vein thrombosis, it's wise to invest in some kind of sitting aid.

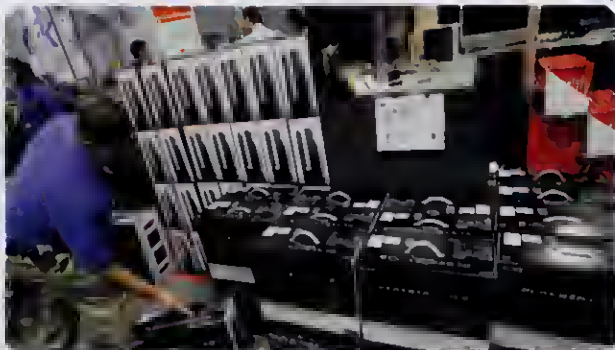
Fast food

Ringing for pizza is the best way to get a hot meal down you while keeping your place in the queue.

Coolbox

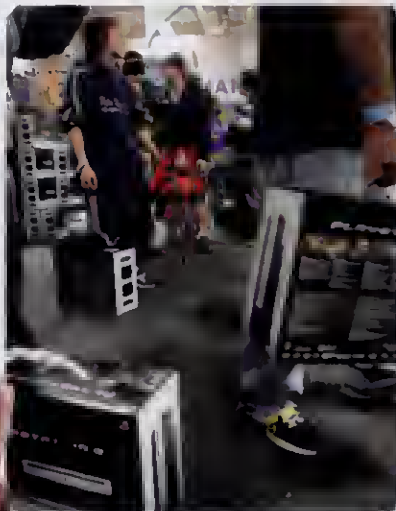
Pack some sandwiches and a thermos, and your PSP for some WiFi action with fellow gamers.

AP Photo/Jae C. Hong



PS3s are stacked by a member of staff in preparation to go on sale at midnight, 16 November, at a Best Buy shop in Los Angeles.

AP Photo/Jae C. Hong

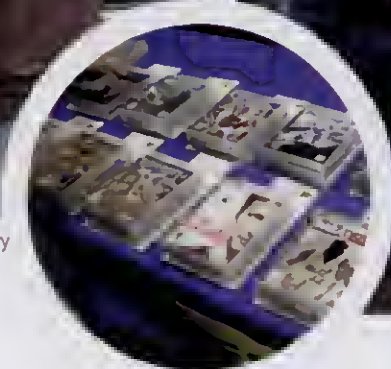


Having waited for days, intrepid PlayStation fans reach the finishing line in Los Angeles.

AP Photo/Paul Sakuma/Adnan



Emerging victorious, Adrian Saguid does a celebratory dance as one of the first to get his hands on a PS3.



The wait is over for Justin Ho, pictured here leaving a shop with his PS3 in hand.

AP Photo/Paul Sakuma/Justin Kwong

Crazed PS3 fans

Some will risk life and limb to play next-gen

Jaw breaker



West Bend, Wisconsin, and here's Craig Weston, 19, slamming himself head-first into a metal pole during the crazed rush for PS3s at Wal-Mart. He picked up a smashed jaw as a result.

Fresno Riots

Scenes were just as ugly in Fresno, California. Police had little control over people who rioted to get in line for a PS3 at a Best Buy shop.



The crowd erupts as a staff member calls for the first 34 to get in-line.



Police look utterly helpless as a surge of gamers become a dangerous mob.



A mass of people start shoving and fighting to join the line.



Some take it too far and are hauled off by the disgruntled rozzers.

opinion

Honey, we need a PS3

"Honey, we

need



You've made up your mind - you must have one. But what if your partner, house

eed

a PS3...”



mates or parents aren't convinced? Here's how to persuade them...



You've been watching it for a year – memorising the specs, lasciviously gawping at screenshots, signing up for a gazillion pre-order notification services... There's just one minor problem: convincing everyone else in your house that buying a PS3 is a good idea. It's not just the price: your girlfriend may be worried that a next-gen console will ruin her Tuscan cottage-style decor; your idle housemates may want you to drop the cash on a new car to ferry them around

engine produces state-of-the-art visuals comparable with PC graphics cards retailing at £200. Forget polygon counts, modern graphics are all about vertex and pixel-shader performance and the RSX cranks out a jarring 100 billion shader operations per second.

The bargains just keep coming. Dedicated Blu-ray players sell for £1,000 right now, but Blu-ray is built-in as



“40 original games are already being developed for PS3 download”

in; your parents may think you should spend your student loan on something well, studenty. You may have to win them all over. Which is where we come in.

We've tackled the key issues surrounding PS3 at the moment, in a bid to give you the essential ammunition to counter the scaremongers, the non-believers and, crucially, those easily led by internet gossip. The rest is up to you...

It's not expensive, it's an investment...

There's no getting away from it, £425 is a lot of money. But then, you're getting a hell of a lot for it; the PS3 components are so advanced, Sony is losing well over £100 on every unit it sells. IBM's Cell engine, with its unprecedented multi-processor setup, brings super-computing power to the living room – nothing like this has ever been available outside the confines of university laboratories and shady military research facilities. Meanwhile, NVIDIA's 550MHz RSX 'Reality Synthesizer' graphics

standard. And if you're interested in watching HD movies on your console, the 360 soon looks like less of a cunning purchase when you consider its HD DVD player costs £130 extra.

Want to play online? PS3 offers this for free – Xbox 360 owners have to sign-up for the Gold Service at £34 a year. Fancy going wireless? Fine, PS3 has built-in WLAN (Wireless Local Area Network) so you can hook up to your home network; the 360 requires a £55 wireless adaptor. Conversely, Wii comes with WiFi support but users have to pay for a LAN adaptor if they want to go wired.

Factor in the bevy of home entertainment options – from movie and music playback to internet browsing and

PS3 MYTH BUSTER

You need a top-of-the-range HDTV to play PS3 games

PS3 slurs... pr... resolution. However v... almost any hard d... pretty but the v... wh... h... that...

videochat – and you have a machine that will shame PCs costing twice the price. And this thing will be under your TV for a decade. Expensive? You're joking, right?

You'll soon wonder how we managed without it

Here's the vital message – PS3 isn't a games machine. Call it a next-generation entertainment hub if you want (actually, don't), but this is the single-box solution everyone's been waiting for. The basics are all there: it'll handle CDs and DVDs, it'll store thousands of music files and play them back via the iPod via USB and it'll play music from there. Digital photographers

can plug in a camera, CompactFlash or SD card and download images, viewing them on the 60GB machine's ace desktop display.

PS3 does web surfing via its user-friendly browser, offering both on-screen input and USB mouse and keyboard options. The comprehensive Flash 7.0 support means hours of YouTube

fun, and most blogging software is compatible – you can already upload photos to the web, but soon it'll handle video too. Ecommerce works fine with the PS3's browser, so inveterate online shoppers can hit eBay, Amazon and the rest between gaming sessions.

And for those households agonising over which VoIP standard to go for, forget them all – PS3 does free voice and video calls, as well as instant messaging. With Linux a

downloadable option, home office applications won't be far behind.

Still wavering? Hit cinema-loving doubters with Blu-ray, the most widely supported and technologically advanced of the two high-definition movie standards. And in case of emergency, go for the tidy living room angle – PS3 eliminates at least three of those ugly boxes under the TV.

The games are going to look a-ma-zing

At the moment, admittedly, it's pretty close between PS3 and Xbox 360 visuals. But things are going to change. Xbox 360 is more than a year old, so developers have gained experience with the hardware and are working on second-generation titles. With PS3, most studios are only on their first project, and still learning.

But here's the really important message – many current PS3 games are only really using the machine's PowerPC Processing Element (PPE) – the general purpose processor at the heart of IBM's Cell engine. The seven

secondary processors – or SPU's – are hardly being touched at the moment. When development really gets going, programmers will use these specialised chips to process specific elements such as physics, surround sound and AI, leaving the PPE and the NVIDIA graphics chipset to do what they're good at, generating and sorting enormously complex 3D graphics.

Several first-party titles are already finding clever uses for the chips – the incredible Formula One title from SCE Liverpool utilises SPU's to create hugely realistic rain effects and a stunning heat haze effect behind the cars. Heavenly

Sword, meanwhile, has an SPU set aside purely to animate the lead character's flowing auburn hair. (Note: not ginger.)

With the second wave of PS3 games, then, we're going to see greater use of breathtaking effects like High Dynamic Range lighting as well as realistic fluid dynamics, profoundly subtle shadowing and extraordinarily realistic character animation. And, increasingly, it will be viewable in ultra-sharp 1080p.

PS3 MYTH BUSTER

PS3 is too bulky

Yes, the internal power supply is a little bit noisy, but it's more than made up for by the extra cooling space it provides for the PS3's games, and those with the PS3's

Online gaming is the future of entertainment

In the run up to launch, the secrecy surrounding Sony's online multiplayer plans gave rise to a great heap of festering rumours – the service is broken, it's crap, it doesn't exist. All nonsense. It's true that launch title Resistance: Fall of Man uses its own custom online gaming infrastructure, but Sony is rolling out a fully integrated service in 2007. Similar to Xbox Live, PS3 titles will support matchmaking, in-game voice chat via any Bluetooth headset and, of course, a Friends list.

And despite persistent claims to the contrary, social elements will be accessible in-game – while playing you'll be notified if a friend signs in, or if you've received a message. The system will also support seamless cross-game invites allowing you to challenge players, even if they're busy playing something else, so you never miss a chance to play against a friend.



Alongside Sony's own community system, developers are free to add extra features such as custom ranking systems and lobbies to their games. What PlayStation Network doesn't have is Xbox Live's Achievement system and Gamer Points, but as these have alienated a lot of casual users who don't have the time or desire to rack up enormous scores just so they don't get called 'teh n00bz0r' every time they go online, that's not much of a sacrifice... Oh yes, and for most games, PlayStation Network is free.

the console's meagre 64MB memory card). Linux support could even provide a route for bedroom coders to get their own games onto PS3, perhaps even bypassing any form of official Sony control. Remember, Sony has a history of nurturing home-brew development, making Linux available on PS2 and releasing a programmable version of PS1, called Net Yaroze, aimed at

modes and extra content. Oh, and just to ram it home one final time. GTAIV will appear on both systems on the same day: 19 October 2007. And guess which pad we'd rather play it with.

Like DVD? You're going to love Blu-ray
Is Blu-ray worth all the trouble? Yuh-huh. Forget about the whole issue of HD movies for a second and think about

"Want to play online? It's free on PS3, but 360 owners have to pay"

We can download new games whenever we get bored

Xbox Live Arcade hasn't really lived up to its hype. Microsoft approves, at most, one game a week and as a huge majority of these are simple, casual titles or ports of classic arcade games, the innovative indie gems we were all promised are few and far between. In contrast there are already 40 original titles in development for PS3 download and plenty more on the way - independent developers have been actively invited by Sony to ignore established genres and bring new experiences to the console. Also, every PS3 system has a hard drive, so there's less of a restriction on the size of game downloads, which should make for more meaty experiences (Live Arcade games must be small enough for Core system owners to be able to download them onto

students and hobbyist coders. Suddenly Xbox Live's collection of '80s arcade coffin-dodgers and bored housewife puzzle games don't look so cool.

How can 10,000 developers be wrong?

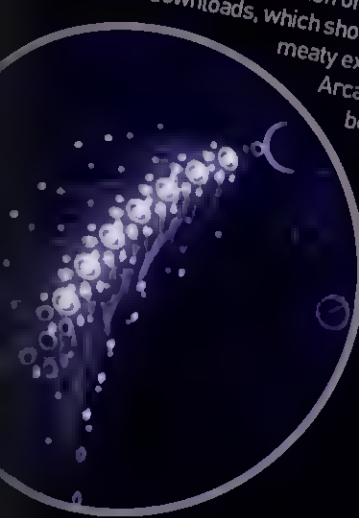
There are concerns PS3 is losing developer support - but only among morons. Sony has shipped around 10,000 PS3 development kits to studios around the world. Every single major publisher (and plenty of not-so-major ones) are working on PS3 projects. Yes, we've recently seen titles such as GTA and Pro Evolution Soccer slipping over to Xbox 360, but this is more about publishers needing to keep revenue flowing in, than a conscious decision to move away from PlayStation. Indeed, current Xbox exclusives such as Kane & Lynch and BioShock will appear on PS3. Okay, so some games - like the next Splinter Cell - will appear first on Xbox 360. But even in those instances, when our version arrives it will be with the new

storage capacity. While a DVD manages 4.7GB and an HD DVD boasts 15GB, a standard single-layer Blu-ray disc can hold 25GB of data - an enormous amount of space to store graphics. Some of the huge, intricate environments we're already seeing in PS3 titles - Lair, for instance - are only possible thanks to Blu-ray. Indeed, Ryan Schneider of Insomniac Games recently said that Resistance takes up a whopping 22GB of disc space. Now back to Blu-ray as a movie-viewing device... nothing is certain in this latest cinematic format war, but Blu-ray is well placed for success with the

PS3 MYTH BUSTER

The tilt control is a white elephant

Wrong! Most of us...
mecha-sm With Madden...
jump snaps, while...
balancing and...
aid for first-person...
how you ever played our...



backing of over 170 companies including the likes of Apple, Dell, Hitachi, LG and Samsung. As for the movie studios, Blu-ray has several key players on its side – HD DVD's only exclusive backing comes from Universal and the Weinstein Company. This format battle will take years to pan out, but in the meantime you'll have an HD movie player that works *right now* on which to enjoy the dozens of Blu-ray releases.



It's going to be a must-have for parties

In the frothy-mouthed media frenzy surrounding Wii and its emphasis on fun, family gaming, everyone seems to have forgotten one thing: Sony has been producing hysterically funny and utterly accessible social games for over a decade. From the day-glo pop fun of Parappa The Rapper to the innovative EyeToy camera range and the phenomenal Guitar Hero. PlayStation hardware has always been host to innovative new ideas designed to engage non-gamers – and always will be.

Karaoke sim SingStar has been a key element of PS3 pre-publicity. Sony's Phil Harrison showcased a new version of the game at E3, featuring downloadable songs taken from the entire series, as well as the chance to upload your performances to the internet or to PSP. As for Buzz, developer Relentless Software won't confirm anything except that they're working on next-gen projects.

Creative director, David Amor, told us, "I can think of some pretty cool things you could do with Buzz once you're connected to thousands of players." He also talked about the potential of Sony's improved PS3 EyeToy cam:

"I have a hundred ideas for EyeToy games because PS3 lets me use it in ways which weren't possible before. The resolution of the camera and character models are higher, meaning I can get a good likeness of myself in games; the internet connection means I can use the EyeToy as a webcam; and the e-Distribution Initiative enables me to create smaller games which you can download and play in five minutes."

The PS3 excuse-o-card

We've armed you with all the necessary knowledge, but keep this handy in case you run into any 'emergencies'

1. You can make **free voice** and **video calls** on it!
2. It does **everything** a PC can – **at half the price!**
3. It's **edutainment!**
4. This will be the **last console** we need for **ten years!**
5. It can **talk to your PSP!**
6. It **looks cool** in your living room!
7. Look what it **does** when it **plays a CD!**
8. We can get **rid of the hi-fi, computer, DVD player** and loads of **cables!**
9. Social gaming is the **new clubbing!**
10. **Everybody** we know will be consumed by **jealous rage!**

feature

Blacksite: Area 51





There goes the

Planet

In the sequel to PS2's **Area 51**, Blacksite weaves a sinister web of aliens, conspiracy theory and real-world politics. Know this: nothing is as it seems...

Location: Rachel, Nevada

Dissecting Blacksite: Area 51's small town invasion

Blacksite mostly takes place at the spiritual home of expatriate aliens in the Mojave desert. Specifically, in the town of Rachel, Nevada: unofficial gatehouse to Area 51, the US military's best known secret military base. It seems Rachel has been overrun by grotesquely mutated pond life, presumably the remnants of the first Area 51's climactic meltdown.

Drop zone

You can drive combat vehicles in Blacksite, which is a big improvement over the original Area 51. The dev team haven't yet decided whether choppers will be flyable, but this one drops off a very agile armoured car with a mounted machine gun that makes light work of the aggressive ETs.

This Island Earth

The game artists have been working hard to recreate the feel of an isolated, rural American town abandoned after the destruction of the nearby base; always the perfect place to make you feel at the mercy of an alien threat. There's a railway station, a cinema, a water tower and a TV mast - all eerie reminders of the normality that existed before the aliens arrived.



Previously in Area 51

When Midway released Area 51 for PS2 in May 2005, it would have been easy to pass it off as just another 'me too' sci-fi shooter - particularly as it was inspired by an ancient arcade lightgun game. However, once you began working through the story, it became clear there was a degree of intelligence to the narrative. After the famous Roswell crash, the game suggested, aliens were brought to the secret Area 51 military base, and began working with a pair of human scientists on organic super-weapons. Naturally, this fragile

collaboration breaks down when one scientist becomes power-mad, and the other releases a lethal mutating virus into the lab. This forces the US government to send in the Hazardous Materials team, and, in the process, expose the happenings within. As leader of that team you face a series of genetically engineered mutants in a tense, if a little predictable, first-person shooter. The final level sees the Roswell aliens trying to escape the decimated Area 51 before the base explodes. This is where we think Blacksite will begin.



Collateral damage

While *Blacksite* is being constructed predominantly in Midway's Austin studio, technology is being shared with other Midway developers including the creators of *Stranglehold*. The result is that the 'Massive D' material destruction tech shown to such devastating effect in John Woo's *Hard Boiled* game sequel, will be used in *Blacksite*. As well as the obligatory Hollywood set-piece explosions, real-time damage will be inflicted on the environment around your surroundings as you go about your hosing.

Hardware

The mutated enemy doesn't go down easy, and the combat tempo is fast and twitchy in a similar way to *Timesplitters* or *Resistance*. Good thing you've got the tools for the job. As well as superbly detailed on-weapon displays and snappy reloads, shooter staples like a gun-launched grenade, sniper scope and rocket launcher are all at your disposal.

Area 51: alien research or just a load of planes?

Two hours from the earthly excess of Las Vegas lies Route 375, a remote road known as The Extraterrestrial Highway. If you drive up there and set your sat nav to indicate when you reach 37°24'89.2"N, 115°24'58.6"W you'll find yourself on a dirt track stretching off towards the horizon. This leads to Groom Lake Base, AKA Area 51, a dry lake bed converted into an air strip complex in 1955 to test the U-2 spy plane. Since then it's been used to develop the similarly clandestine SR-71 Blackbird and the F-22 Raptor, giving Area 51 a reputation

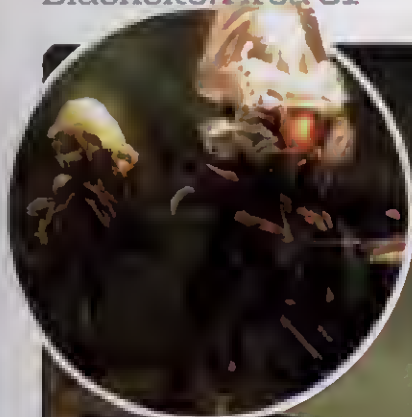
as the proving ground for virtually any high-concept warplane technology the US military doesn't want anyone to see. Of course, Area 51 is better known as a top secret underground base filled with alien tech, as claimed by Bob Lazar, an ex-employee who went on national TV in the US and revealed he'd worked on UFOs and alien technology in his time there. He was later discredited, but the beauty of the Area 51 myth is that, because its full purpose remains a secret, the base can be whatever you want it to be.



Next-gen mutants

In the original Area 51, the traditional 'take me to your dealer' Grey aliens helped invent a set of super weapons made of things like T-Rex DNA and titanium. They looked like aliens, and generally had seven lime-green eyes, big gobs and a slimy complexion. The parenthood of Blacksite's mutants has yet to be revealed, but we wouldn't be surprised if they were related to their predecessors.

Future generations...



PS3
090

Pest control

It's all about working as a team

Blacksite is unashamedly squad-based, but Midway Austin has worked hard to ensure directing your grunts is as easy as firing a gun. "We wanted to dedicate one button to squad commands, rather than using a fly-out menu or something similarly cumbersome," explains Creative Director Harvey Smith. We're shown various tasks like helping comrades over fences and planting G4 explosive, all executed by pointing at an object and pressing a single button.

Inspirations

Apocalypse Now

Francis Ford Coppola's inspired, if self-indulgent psycho-war epic is a great starting point for developing realistic human responses to the havoc and madness of close-combat in your squad's AI. Just be careful not to 'do a Kurtz'



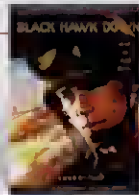
Generation Kill

Harrowing, and on occasions blackly humorous, this first-hand account of war on the front-line with the First Recon (the unit who spearheaded the invasion of Iraq) is being pored over to ensure authenticity in a Middle East flashback level.



Black Hawk Down

A film inspired by real events, that recreates the bloody battle of Mogadshu in 1993 (in which two US choppers were downed by Somali rebels) and charts the subsequent rescue mission. The film's harrowing depiction of the chaos of war is what the makers of Blacksite want to reverse engineer





Heavy weather

Area 51 has been turned into a huge alien-infected nest spewing a column of swirling viridian-tinted gas into the sky. At certain points during the level set in Nevada this is visible on the horizon, reminding you of your proximity to the base. In this shot you can clearly make out the green tinge in the sky.

Special force

Key to Blacksite is a useful and believable team of elite soldiers who fight alongside you. Each has their own personality and world view (one is Arabic, for example). The developers claim that they can harness PS3 so your AI comrades react to your gameplay choices and tactics in their body language, facial expressions and voice.

091

The real blacksites

Abu Ghraib

Notorious Iraqi prison that hit world headlines after it was alleged that the US military had been torturing and abusing prisoners there. The most high profile blacksite, and almost certainly a game location.



The Salt Pit

Located in Afghanistan, this former CIA prison housed its detainees in a disused brickworks, many of whom were flown there from Guantanamo Bay. Former prisoners have talked of another centre known as 'the dark prison' near Kabul.



Diego Garcia

This tropical atoll hides a busy US military base for planes and warships. Human rights groups have claimed it has been used for interrogating untined criminal suspects beyond the protection of the US legal system.



feature

Blacksite: Area 51

They came from the desert...

Classified information from the depths of Area 51

1

Weapon hybrid

While the game's time frame is yet to be announced, this weapon look like an upgraded version of the current US service rifle, the M16.

2

No vacancies

Abandoned buildings like this hotel, neon sign flashing forlornly, punctuate the bleak surroundings.

3

The Reborn

The alien race you're fighting is known as The Reborn. They are alien-human experiments gone wrong that have escaped Area 51 and are out for revenge.



Alien autopsy

Opening up Blacksite with a scalpel and forceps

An interview with Harvey Smith, Creative Director at Midway's Austin Studios, goes some way to lift the clandestine murk shrouding Blacksite's plot. The premise seems generic – Special Forces hard-cases are sent in to 'mop up' after the destruction of Area 51 – but the revelation that the story begins in present-day Iraq hints at intriguing depth. Smith mentions that Blacksite will touch on today's global fears – the war on terror and the rise of extremism, before going on to urge us to look up the word 'blacksite' on Wikipedia. It refers to classified bases the US military refuses to admit exists, or whose true purpose remains under wraps.

Another area that reflects this uncharacteristically intelligent approach to shooters is the creation of your squad. The truth is, in most squad-based games your supposed team members are more of a liability than a godsend. Smith hopes to set that right, "We identified life-like squad, squad command and morale, and intensity as key features of Blacksite a while back. We

expressions, combat tactics and attitudes they'll do it through their voice too. It's really one of the most exciting things I've been around in years," Smith enthuses.

A squad that can look after itself and add to the emotional intensity of the game sounds like a step forward, but what really caught our eye during a tour of Midway Austin was the quality of the conceptual artwork lining the walls. The theme of blending the familiar with the unfamiliar is striking and effective – one image shows aliens overturning a 7-Eleven convenience store, another had them scaling a locomotive in an abandoned train yard. "We just took this theme and thought, what would it be like if we set a level in a school?" says Smith. It's odd then that images of the final level show a more traditional dingy 'alien nest' level that could be straight out of James Cameron's Aliens. As with much we're privy to on this tour it's marked 'Work In Progress'.

"The revelation that the story begins in present-day Iraq hints at intriguing depth."

want the intensity and tension of the situation, as driven by the player's actions, to influence the mood of the squad members. And we want to pay this off, tactically."

Later on we're shown the depth of this AI via a blank test level. A programmer places one of the team in a darkened room and initiates a terrifying moaning noise to represent an alien lurking in the shadows. Instantly the character's idle stance changes from cocksure and blasé to crouched and heavy breathing. His face even begins to twitch. "When morale is high, which is based on the player's performance and a bunch of other factors, the squad is more aggressive. They fire more often and more accurately. When things are going to hell rapidly, the squad tends to enact the military rule of C.Y.A." [That's Cover Your Ass.] It's not in place yet, but this morale/intensity system will also have an impact on dialogue – your buddy might start questioning your orders, for

example. "As well as expressing their views and feelings through dynamic body postures, facial

While he might have a wall full of unfinished levels (Blacksite isn't out until the autumn) one area Smith has set in stone are the online options. "It's one of the most important features. We've been committed to letting two players play through the story/campaign together co-operatively from day one. We've given them asymmetrical abilities – one player commands the squad, the other has a different set of powers," he explains. Player-to-player voice is fully supported too, ensuring the communication between your real-life compatriot is as effective as the CPU-controlled squad.

Despite the early nature of Blacksite's design and gameplay, the so-called 'vertical slice' we're shown (a single level designed to show off the game's tech in one controlled area) supports much of the ambitious goal setting. On PS2, Area 51 was a solid, if slightly sterile FPS. On PS3 that foundation is being taken to the next level. "We're trying to create a world class shooter," concludes Smith. "A new FPS franchise with unique features and good shooter gameplay, but we also want to get the more subtle aesthetics right." Watch the skies. Blacksite is coming.

Giger counter

While the original Area 51's aliens were designed by special effects guru Stan Winston, the new designs have more in common with the work of bio-mech horror artist HR Giger.

Buddy
Make bad choices in battle and he'll get upset. Or die.

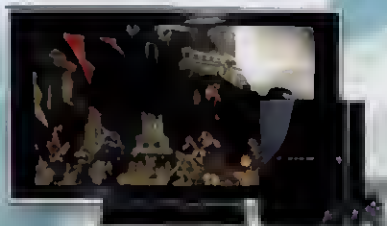
QTR

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The OPM review setup



Our review code is tested on hi-def and standard-def TVs to ensure we know how games perform at both ends of the scale. Our HD setup is a 70" Sony Bravia.



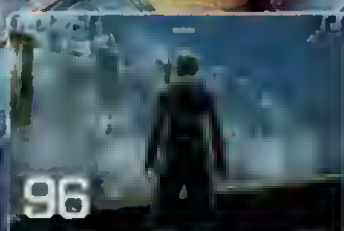
PlayStation.
Official Magazine - UK

Reviews

Your must-read guide to every new release

When the Final Fantasy XII review was handed in, the score caused a ripple of panic among the team. So high? So soon? But the truth is that anything less would have been selling the game short. This is a landmark role-player that comfortably outclasses anything that's gone before on PS2.

Observant readers will not be that everything reviewed this month is for PS2 and PSP, but it's not long before the PS3 reviews will start coming in. Rest assured we'll have the most innovative and fun every PS3 launch game in time for the March release. In the meantime, take a look at Okami - who could resist the chance to become a magical wolf with a thing for watercolours?



96

FINAL FANTASY XII

After *Dirge Of Cerberus* there were fears that the Final Fantasy series had lost its spark; this stunning RPG proves otherwise.



106

OKAMI

Obscurely written and incomprehensibly vast, this medieval adventure is unlike anything seen before on any console.



112

GOD HAND

Taking its lead from *Devil May Cry*, this traditional yet meaty beat-'em-up is tough, brutal and weird.

How we score our reviews...

10 Essential

Instant classic that's as close as it gets to PlayStation perfection.

9 Outstanding

Highly recommended, and an investment you won't regret.

8 Very Good

Mostly excellent, but held back by one or two minor flaws.

7 Good

Enjoyable, but with definite room for improvement. Rent it first.

6 Reasonable

A decent offering, but one that only satisfies in places.

5 Average

A game that is both fun and frustrating in equal measure.

4 Below average

Too flawed to be anything more than a brief curiosity.

3 Poor

A seriously flawed game offering with no long-term appeal.

2 Awful

A disgrace to the bargain bin. Avoid it as you would a bullet.

1 Horrific

Buy this shocker and watch your console self-combust in protest.

GOLD AWARD
PlayStation

Our highest accolade

The gold award is presented to any game that we feel demonstrates significant innovation, near flawless gameplay, great graphics and long-lasting appeal.

review PS2
Final Fantasy XII





RPG majesty

Final Fantasy XII

The beautiful role-playing series has changed forever – but rest assured, that’s good news



Info

Format PS2 ETA 23 Feb Pub Square
Erix Ony Square Erix Players 1
Web finalfantasyxii.com
It's like experiencing the best RPG series for the first time, all over again.

Chances are you've already decided about Final Fantasy XII. In the same way that a new Gran Turismo or Metal Gear Solid will never stray far from the path of its predecessors, the Final Fantasy series – one of PlayStation's best-known faces – seems an unlikely candidate for a makeover. Final Fantasy is now so synonymous with the Japanese role-playing game that even those who rarely play videogames know what to expect from it. Historically, this is how it's gone...

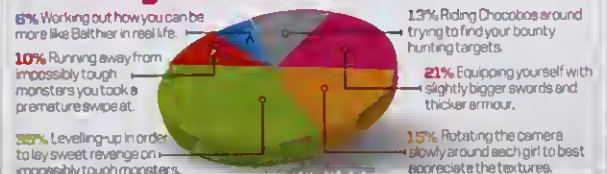
There's a boy – an orphan usually (because this neatly combines free spiritedness with forlorn pathos) – who lives in some off-the-map pastoral village nestled in the navel of a lush rolling landscape. If it weren't for the life-altering event about to invade his rural routine the boy would likely live the same year 70 times over before quietly passing away. But he has a purpose; an uncanny sense of fairness

and justice, and, most importantly, the finger of fate pressed hard against his forehead. And so, within five minutes of the PS2's laser hitting the disc, the village is destroyed, a nemesis revealed, and the boy sucked into an angry hurricane of storytelling that will transform him first into a man and second into a hero.

Japanese RPGs are about the archetypal companions that accompany the young lead on his adventure: the meek, white-cloaked healer girl; the 7ft tall, broad-shouldered, gruff (but-soft-hearted) mercenary; the dark-eyed, suspicious black mage; the lithe and attractive thief.

Yes, say the haters, but they are also about never-ending random battles that puncture your suspension of disbelief every 30 paces. They are about floating hit points, ▶

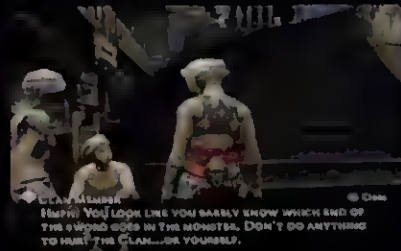
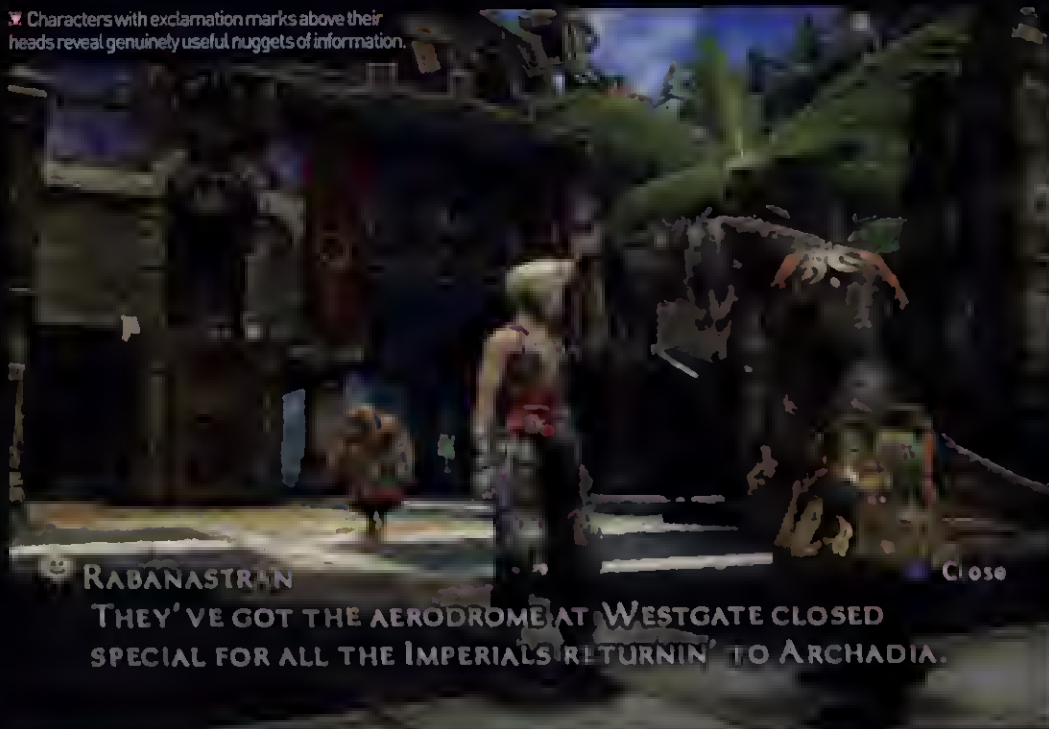
What you do in... FFXII



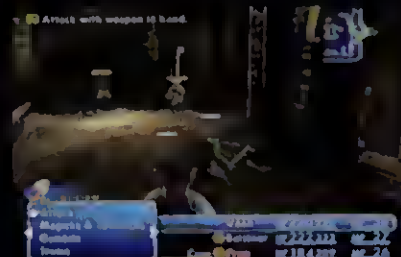
review PS2

Final Fantasy XII

Characters with exclamation marks above their heads reveal genuinely useful nuggets of information.



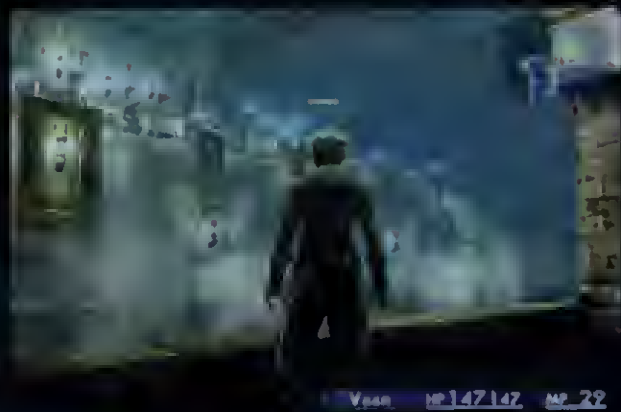
Defeating bigger monsters can reap considerable rewards from your clan leader, Mont Blanc.



Fights are now governed using the game's Gambit system, which gives you full control over the action.



Environments are gorgeous to look at and beautifully lit, unlike the RPG dungeons of old.



long-haul demand on gamers' time, that they're often less about skill and more about an epic test of endurance. All of which adds up to a deeply ingrained gameplay template. So much so, that, love them or hate them, Japanese RPGs have given nothing substantially new to the world of videogames for years.

So chances are, you already think you've got Final Fantasy XII's number. But put those preconceptions on ice for a moment. Better still, cast them out of your head altogether and walk away. Yes, there are echoes of the above resounding clearly through this game. This is Final Fantasy after all, but XII shifts everything so dramatically, so assuredly into the future that you need to pay attention again: Japanese role-playing has a new king.

A sublime city

Rabanastre, a heaving capital city filled with bodies and noise, is where Final Fantasy XII opens. You might think that PS2 is too old to impress but you'd be desperately wrong. This place is astonishingly beautiful. Buildings 50ft high lean over cobbled streets, each structure seemingly designed by a master architect and chiselled to

perfection some 200 years before the game chose to show it to you. The ivy-clad stone walls and bubbling fountains are imbued with a solidity and presence that owe much more to the developer's vision than to the processing power of PS2.

Rabanastre is a city under occupation in the nation of Dalmasca – itself but one territorial jigsaw piece on the sprawling continent of Ivalice. Its streets are generously populated with all the racial diversity of a Star Wars metropolis but with all the timeless Japanese character design of the Final Fantasy lineage. Men, women and urchins go about their lives dressed in vibrant, alien fashions, sometimes rubbing scaly shoulders with the bipedal Bangaa lizard race or brushing past the lithe, bunny-eared Vieras. Chocobos – the series'

dry statistical management and boring mathematics disguised by cute, bright anime colours and impossibly big eyes. They're about parochial towns inhabited by mostly indistinguishable residents waiting to be asked for their two lines of dialogue, which they'll repeat as many times as you stand in front of them and hit X

No matter where you venture in FFXII, the sense of place is powerfully achieved.

Finally, critics say, they're about the impending end of the world at the hands of an evil overlord, the fate of mankind seeing-sawing on your will to reach the final battle and bring the 60-hour epic to a long, overdue conclusion. And it's because of this

Timeline Final Fantasy series highlights

1988



Final Fantasy
NES/Famicom

Where it all started. Who'd have thought four, ten-pixel-high orphans could have launched such a phenomenon?

1994



Final Fantasy VI
Super Nintendo

Released as FFIII in North America. Any game that mixes the destruction of the world (halfway through its story) with opera was bound to turn heads.

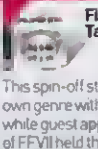
1997



Final Fantasy VII
PS1

Without the astonishing success of this game, the PS1's fate might have been very different. The death of Aens broke as many hearts as the game won.

1998



Final Fantasy Tactics
PS1

This spin-off strategy game defined its own genre with life-devouring depth, while guest appearances from the cast of FFVII held the mythology together.

2001



Final Fantasy X
PS2

Demonstrated the PS2's capabilities while annoying some with its angst-ridden, spoilt lead character, Tidus.



✎ A Scrabble-like licence board is now used to unlock abilities and items to upgrade your heroes.

huge yellow-feathered birds – lazily pick at straw on street corners as their keepers wait for travellers to hire them for transport. Moogles, the tiny cat-like mascots of countless Final Fantasy games, sell armour, weapons and herbs from market stalls buckling with inviting wares. And all this plays out under the shadows of dark political machinations taking place high above the bustling streets.

It's against this dizzyingly rich backdrop that you're introduced to the lead character: the blonde, androgynous and faintly irritating Vaan. As a teenager with no family, few commitments and little motivation save for a hatred of the occupying Archadian forces, he's a perfect blank protagonist for you to develop through the story. Vaan is a petty thief who, to begin with, has no quests grander than finding his next meal and helping out the local shopkeeper under whose roof he's currently sheltering. However, during a bodged robbery, Vaan is unwittingly swept into a narrative carnival that sees him joining pirates and princesses to ride Chocobos across deserts, hitching rides on

Castlist

Orphan boy



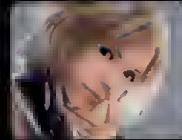
Vaan
17-year-old street urchin and the unlikely hero of Final Fantasy XII.

Gruff sky-pirate



Balthier
Pilot of the Strahl airship, aged 22. Son of Final Fantasy stalwart Dr Cid.

Love interest



Ashie
Full name: Ashie S'nargin Dalmasca (!). Stunning 19-year-old princess.

She's 60!



Fran
Balthier's right-hand lady, this estranged Viera is a bow and arrow expert.

17 Imperial LUN.
Galeedo readies Lunge.



Attack Vaan HP 125 208 MP 39
Attack Balthier HP 191 214 MP 29

airships to floating islands, breaking into long-forgotten tombs to recover ancient heirlooms, traversing snow-capped mountain ranges to visit tranquil monasteries, and all in an over-arching quest to overthrow the invading empire and restore peace to Ivalice.

So, narratively, Final Fantasy XII doesn't throw the baby out with the bath water – you *do* control a young orphan and his band of merry men as they try to save the world. But this is a game that reveals its treasures in such a creative, ingenious, and altogether polished way, that you scarcely notice the familiar story furrows you're treading. Instead, it feels fresh and exciting, casting you as a tiny, yet crucial cog in the grinding mechanisms of an all-consuming crisis.

It's here that the game's narrative brilliance becomes clear – something that's

✎ Occasionally you have to fight with your fists, but 'brawl upgrades' mean even those can be improved.

Did you know?

Nicole Fanti, the actress who voices Fran, the sleek bunny-eared Viera, appeared in the films *Moulin Rouge* and *Star Wars Episode II*.



Gairr Warr
Ah, it's so... to w... and... you
Travel how... M... L... M... of you
Travel...

✎ Chatting with strangers is never a waste of time, and casual encounters can change your path.

helped by the sparkling translation from Japanese, and the perfectly pitched voice acting – two hurdles that have crippled so many RPGs before. While Vaan is only just the right side of irritating American teen, the rest of the cast, from the suave, well-spoken sky pirate Balthier to the Björk-ish Fran, are astonishingly well-played and lend a depth to the dialogue that is endlessly arresting. On the whole the dialogue is quick and witty, and for players who enjoyed PS1's excellent *Vagrant Story*, this has been similarly seasoned with just the right amount of olde-speak inflection, so as to provide a period vibe without it grating. All of which serves to spur you from cut-scene to cut-scene, happily chasing the story.

World without end

Of course, as strong as the narrative and characterisations are, the real rewards are to be found within the gameplay. And here, success is underpinned by the new, and startlingly well-designed, battle system.

FFXII's combat appears to work in a similar way to its massively multiplayer ▶



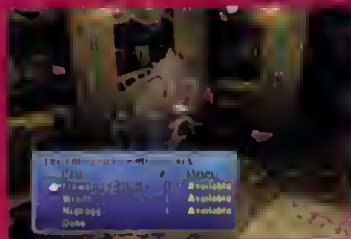
COMBAT LOG
Imperial Marksman B uses a Potions.

Attack Vaan HP 125 220 MP 36
Attack Balthier HP 222 222 MP 27
Attack Fran HP 184 209 MP 27

✎ You can instruct your team members to automatically target the weakest enemy.

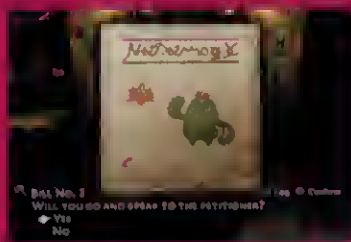
Bounty hunting

Need a break from the main story? Get a freelance job. Here's how:



VIEW THE PERSONALS

Check the bounty-hunting board in any pub – they all show the same adverts.



MAKE A SELECTION

Pick a hunt that takes your fancy – it's as simple as a tap of the \odot button.



PIN BACK YOUR EARS

Visit the person who posted the job advert and listen to their sob story.



DO THE DEED

Now get out there and find the enemy your 'wronged' client wants sorted out.



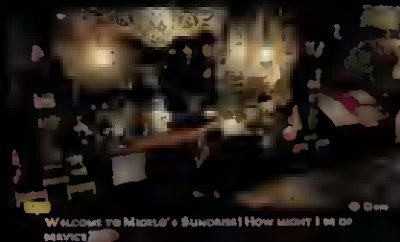
JOB DONE

Solved the 'problem'? Then revisit your employer and pick up the reward.

Escaping this castle dungeon early on in the game requires a combination of wit and brute strength.



During boss encounters your enemy's health bar is helpfully displayed on-screen.



From weaponry and armour, to medicines and potions, you can get your hands on almost anything at the market stalls.

online predecessor – fights occur seamlessly – sweeping aside the genre's much-hated random battles. This enables you to see your enemies before you engage them, and creates an interesting dilemma: do you stand and fight or sneak quietly past? It's a welcome removal of the line between exploration and combat, and makes all the difference to the game's flow.

The real-time fights now use a 'Gambit' management system that plays like a Fisher Price-level AI program. Though that's a good thing because Gambit is more about orchestrating the overall direction of your team than repeatedly inputting attack,

Like this? Play these



Dragon Quest: The Journey Of The Cursed King

Japan's most popular RPG series is more traditional than FFXII but no less beautiful.

VERDICT 9



Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories

A superbly funny tactical RPG that inherited the wit of its predecessor as well as its cavernous gameplay.

VERDICT 8

defend and heal commands. Each character in your team can be assigned conditionally triggered and prioritised actions. At its most simple level this means you can set a rule for a character to automatically target and attack the nearest enemy repeatedly until it's defeated. You might then add in an additional Gambit that instructs your character to cast a 'cure' spell on any team member whose health falls below 70%. While you start the game with only a single Gambit slot (so the system isn't overwhelming to begin with), new AI slots quickly open up as your characters develop. This enables you to mould your team into a carefully balanced and mostly intelligent unit that can comfortably look after themselves and you.

While it might sound too detached for players used to taking a more hands-on approach to RPG battling, the system actually frees you up to take a broader, more managerial view of your team. Perhaps the best way to view Gambit is like a football management sim: you take the role of player-manager, carefully watching how your strategies play out, applying tweaks here and there to the team's formation or tactics, and only intervening with direct commands when the squad is in real trouble.

And real trouble frequently pitches you into direct action. Numerous imposing and tricky boss encounters – both those in the main thrust of the story and side-quests or bounty hunter missions (where you track down troublesome enemies for clients on a freelance basis) – require delicate handling and thoughtful technique. It's worth noting



▲ Costumes are vibrant, detailed and just about avoid any anime gaudiness or cliché.



BARELY KNOW, WAS IT? YET AT A TRICE HE GOES BOUNDING OFF FOR YOU.

▲ The game's cut-scenes are in keeping with the series' high standards, and show off the detailed character design at its best.

that, thanks to the open world, it's always possible to sound the retreat when you've bitten off more than you can chew. And you can always return for revenge when your characters have increased their abilities.

Meet the board

Character abilities are granted via the licence board – an adapted version of the board game-style levelling system debuted in Final Fantasy X. Each defeated enemy gives all of your team members at least one licence point (more for defeating tougher opponents). These points are then accumulated and used to 'buy' ability spaces on a sprawling Scrabble-style board, which then convert into those vital upgrades for your characters.

Abilities range from health point increases to spells; to summons (the power to call upon mighty creatures to save your party's butts in a tight corner), and even weaponry upgrades. Remarkably, there's a licence space on the board to be uncovered before you can lay your mitts upon any piece of equipment in the game. It sounds convoluted but the system improves gameplay by shifting the emphasis from buying up the best gear in town to carefully planning the development and management of resources.

This might seem restrictive but, in practice, it's liberating because it gives you absolute power over how you develop your team. When you purchase a space, all the adjoining squares on the board become available to buy. So, if you want Vaan to specialise in white magic spells, then you uncover and purchase the spaces in that

▲ You control Vaan most of the time, but switching characters is possible using a quick menu option.



▲ A full Magic Point bar (MP) is required for your first spectacular Quickening move, while learning a second and third move respectively doubles and triples your MP gauge.

area of the board. As with so much of the game, it's not a groundbreaking new direction, but a familiar concept brilliantly executed in a fresh and exciting way.

Despite the shake-up of RPG conventions, this is still clearly a Final Fantasy game. Enjoyment hangs in the balance of fighting, team and item management, chasing the storyline and undertaking side-quests – all standard RPG elements. Yet to reduce the experience to its individual parts is like saying Resistance: Fall Of Man is just a 3D Space Invaders. The sheer weight of detail is humbling. The illusion of a persistent, living world groaning with different races, prejudices, royalties, fashions, and most of all histories, is remarkable and holds its wonder over the full 40 hours it will take to reach the game's conclusion.

In short, the staggering number of man-hours that



▲ The Vieras' tree-based Eruyt Village is one of the game's most visually impressive locations.



▲ 'Quickening' moves are essentially re-branded Limit Breaks from previous Final Fantasy titles.

have gone into creating this world have been miraculously well spent. From the melancholy droop of a flower in Salika Woods, to the swell of the orchestra as you stare down the blade of your broadsword before landing the finishing blow on a giant turtle on the Giza plains, Final Fantasy XII is the crowning glory of RPGs. Its brilliance illuminates the flaws

of its rivals, while pointing to an exciting future for a series that many gamers assumed had long-since reached its creative zenith.

Simon Parkin





There's no mercy - on the harder levels, Guitar Hero's riffs and solos will set your fingers on fire

Guitar Hero II

Faster, heavier, louder, harder - the beast is back



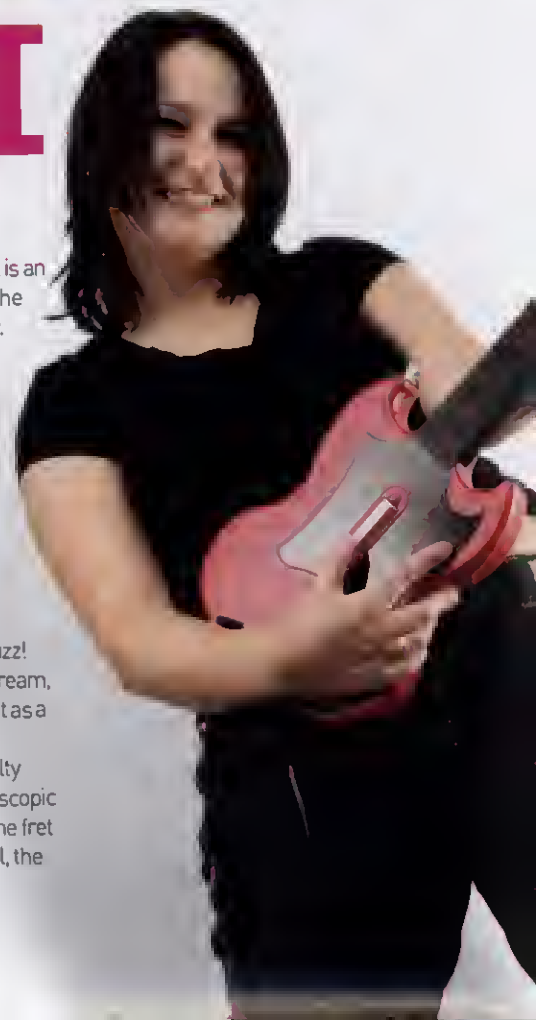
The music business is littered with the corpses of bands who succumbed to 'difficult second album syndrome'. The first record is a quintuple-platinum success. Then the time comes to record a follow-up. The production values are better, but the songs are not. Worse, all the tricks that seemed so fresh and exciting the first time out now seem tired. Thankfully, Guitar Hero II dodges the bullet. It's a superb follow-up, effortlessly improving on almost every aspect of its predecessor.

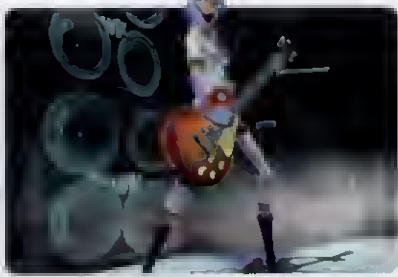
The hook is the same: 'become a guitar god overnight'. You get to play 40 licensed songs (plus bonus tracks) on a (small, plastic) cherry red Gibson SG guitar. As before, there are five coloured fret buttons to hold down while you strum in time with the on-screen icons. Hit the notes and the song plays perfectly. Get it wrong and it sounds like a fire in a guitar factory.

Crucially, the all-important track list is an absolute monster of rock songs from the '70s and on, right up to the present day. Sweet Child O' Mine, Free Bird and War Pigs were expected, but there's also heavier, less obvious stuff from the likes of Lamb Of God, Jane's Addiction and Anthrax. It's a challenging mix, and won't please everyone, but the track list was always going to be a matter of taste.

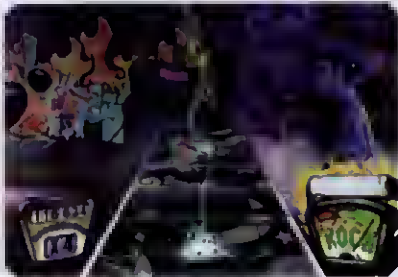
Killing in the name

Guitar Hero is often cited alongside Buzz! and SingStar as proof of PS2's mainstream, family friendliness. But to pigeonhole it as a party game is to ignore the enormous challenge offered by the Expert difficulty level, in which icons arrive in a kaleidoscopic blizzard and your fingers dance over the fret like a burning spider. On a deeper level, the





Each of the game's new-look characters has a second outfit that can be unlocked.



Hit the star-shaped notes and you'll fill up a 'star power' meter that you can unleash for huge points.



Choosing to play bass in the two-player mode doesn't necessarily mean you're in for an easier ride.



The multiplayer modes aren't all competitive: in co-op mode you work together for points.

"Expert level is an enormous challenge, icons arrive in a kaleidoscopic blizzard and your fingers dance on the fret like a burning spider."

game does actually manage to simulate what it's like to play a real guitar. Proof: the best Guitar Hero players in the OPM office are the ones who can actually play guitar. But it's never elitist, as proved by the hugely improved multiplayer mode.

There are three ways to play with mates: co-op, face-off and pro face-off. In co-op two players rock out in tandem. Depending on the song, one player gets the lead guitar while the other plays rhythm or bass. In face-off, two players can choose their own

difficulty levels then take on individual parts of the lead guitar and compete against each other for points. And in pro face-off both players play the entire lead track for points. It's fiercely entertaining, and a massive step forward from the original Guitar Hero.

Okay, problems: there are times when the bitch of a learning curve will break both your head and your fingers. You'll spend days stuck on songs you don't like, crying your way through seemingly impossible solos. You'll happily take on Easy, then Medium, only to find that your favourite songs require Hendrix levels of agility in Hard and Expert. You'd have to be an absolute legend to complete Lynyrd Skynyrd's Free Bird on Hard, let alone Expert – it's over seven minutes long, has the cheesiest solo of all time and notes that fly down the screen. But the challenge of the higher levels only makes it sweeter when you crack them.

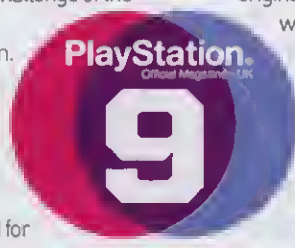
That's where the new practice mode comes in. It lets you go back over songs at slower speeds, which is an absolute godsend for

really tricky sections. That said, the slowed down versions have an odd drum machine-style backbeat that feels cheap, and sometimes makes it hard to keep time.

The more you play though, the more your technique will improve. The trick is to use an up and down motion on the strum switch for fast sections and learn how to hammer your fingers on tricky runs of notes. Persevere and the game will become an obsession. It's only in Expert that you really get that 'I'm playing it, I'm really playing it' feeling. That's because the number of notes you have to hit is closer to the number of notes you're hearing in your ears. And plastic guitar or not, the sense of accomplishment is massive.

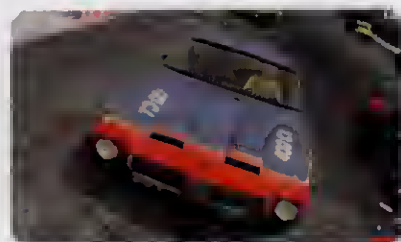
Guitar Hero II avoids 'difficult second album syndrome' because it stays true to its original formula. It's moved on, not with sweeping changes but by concentrating on all the right little touches and making them count. It's all about pleasing the loyal fans but inviting everyone else along, too. So get on the bus.

Helen Woodey





Driver AI is really aggressive – they'll work hard to close off those cheeky inside passes.



The detailed models really show off the visual capabilities of PSP. That's one hot muscle car.



Handheld racing

TOCA Race Driver 3 Challenge

Can the top PS2 racer cut it on PSP?



Info

Format PSP ETA Out now
Pub Codemasters
Dev Sierra Digital
Players 1-2
Web codemasters.co.uk/toca3sp
It's like TOCA3 split in half and welded onto the top of Ridge Racer.

Like ending a suffocating relationship, compromise is often uncomfortable but necessary. Last year, Codemasters brought the mammoth TOCA Race Driver 2 to PSP, but its obstinate approach to the conversion left many handheld gamers frustrated. The epic story mode with its mass of in-depth events worked well on the home consoles, but it was far too overwhelming on PSP's teeny screen.

So TOCA Race Driver 3 has been stripped down like a stolen Sierra Cosworth and re-built as an exclusive portable game. This means intense bursts of turbo-charged racing action based around short, sharp

circuits and lots of save points. Considerably fewer countries and tracks are on offer compared with TOCA 3 on PS2, although you still get plenty of recognisable racing environments, from Brands Hatch to Barbagallo. And of course there's a huge array of licensed race cars exhibiting a multitude of different handling styles.

Crash course

The heart of the game is the World Challenge mode, split into five championships, each containing several races. Before competing in each event drivers must carry out a series of instructional challenges – following the racing line, getting round without causing damage, slaloming between cones, and so on. They're fun, genuinely challenging and enable you to improve your driving style. You can even keep coming back to better your score.

The racing itself is a thrilling combination of

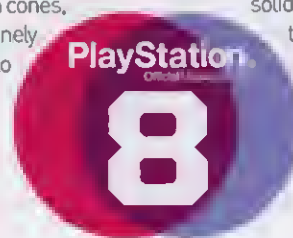


Smashing cars is fun and damage doesn't inhibit your performance too much. TOCA loves bullies.

impishly competitive AI, and a frisky driving feel that's not too realistic to strip the joy out of your race. Crash physics are perfect, with bone-jarring collisions resulting in wings getting ripped off and horrible twisted chassis. Visuals are impressive too, with solidly detailed cars and scenery

that smoothly zips past. Our

only complaint is that the analogue control feels too wayward and, at times, imprecise. A small price to pay though for such a solid experience. **Keith Stuart**





Strategy sim

Thrillville

Theme Park rip-off is fair game

Doc from Back To The Future, apparently moonlighting as your mental Uncle Mortimer, needs you to manage his theme parks and help him beat his rival, Globo-Joy. To do this you'll need to build new rides, hire workers and keep the guests entertained.

Aside from building attractions and allocating cash for research and marketing, everything else is achieved through short yet compelling mini-games, such as training your staff by strutting a series of dance moves or washing away fluorescent vomit. Some are cleverly self-referential; for instance, build an arcade and you have to rack up the highest score by killing space pirates on a first-person shooter. You do this to raise the coin-op's profile and rake in the cash. There is some repetition in game styles, but new missions and a balanced learning curve keep things reasonably fresh. Ace enough of them and you're rewarded with a whole new park to play in.

Instead of absorbing all your cash and forcing you to twiddle your thumbs until bankruptcy looms, the various missions encourage you to engage with your park at every turn, and not just adopt a distant, god-sim style of play. So beware

quick fixes: they come back to haunt you. Having quickly botched together a golf

Info
Format PSP ETA Out now
Pub LucasArts Dev Frontier
Developments Players 1
Web lucasarts.com/games/
thrillville It's like The Sims with
dodgegame and no toilet breaks.



▣ You don't just design the games for your park, you can actually play them as well.



▣ Walk around your park and chat with your customers to find out what needs improving.

course, I was punished by being forced to attempt a gut-wrenchingly impossible hole-in-one on it in a subsequent task. This balance between playing the owner and consumer is key to Thrillville's appeal.

On the management front, Thrillville lacks the depth of similar PS2 effort Theme Park World but

there's still plenty of entrepreneurial fun to be had. Maybe that Business GCSE will pay dividends after all.

Rachel Weber



Japan Watch

A taste of PlayStation from the Far East



Beatmania IIDX 12 Happy Sky

Format PS2 Pub Konami Subtitles No

Where have you been? You've already missed 11 games in Konami's IIDX (Two Decks, see?) DJ mixing series, featuring tunes from rock to techno. You probably don't even have the cumbersome 'wheels of steel' peripheral, do you? Shame on you.



Railfan

Format PS3 Pub Ongakukan Subtitles No

From the thrill seekers behind Train Simulator, Railfan harnesses the awesome power of PS3 to put you in the driving seat of scheduled services throughout Japan and, yes, Chicago. Speed up, slow down, open doors and shut them again. The possibilities are literally four-fold.



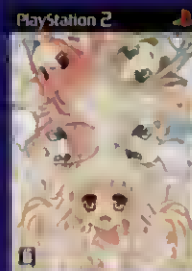
Full House Kiss 2

Format PS2 Pub Capcom Subtitles No

Cult seduction sim sequel that puts you in the shoes of a young woman, hired as the head of a shared house filled with dreamy (sigh) male students (you also serve as a secretary to the school's director). Complete your housework mini-games successfully and you may even find love, you lucky thing.



Exotic Boxart Of The Month



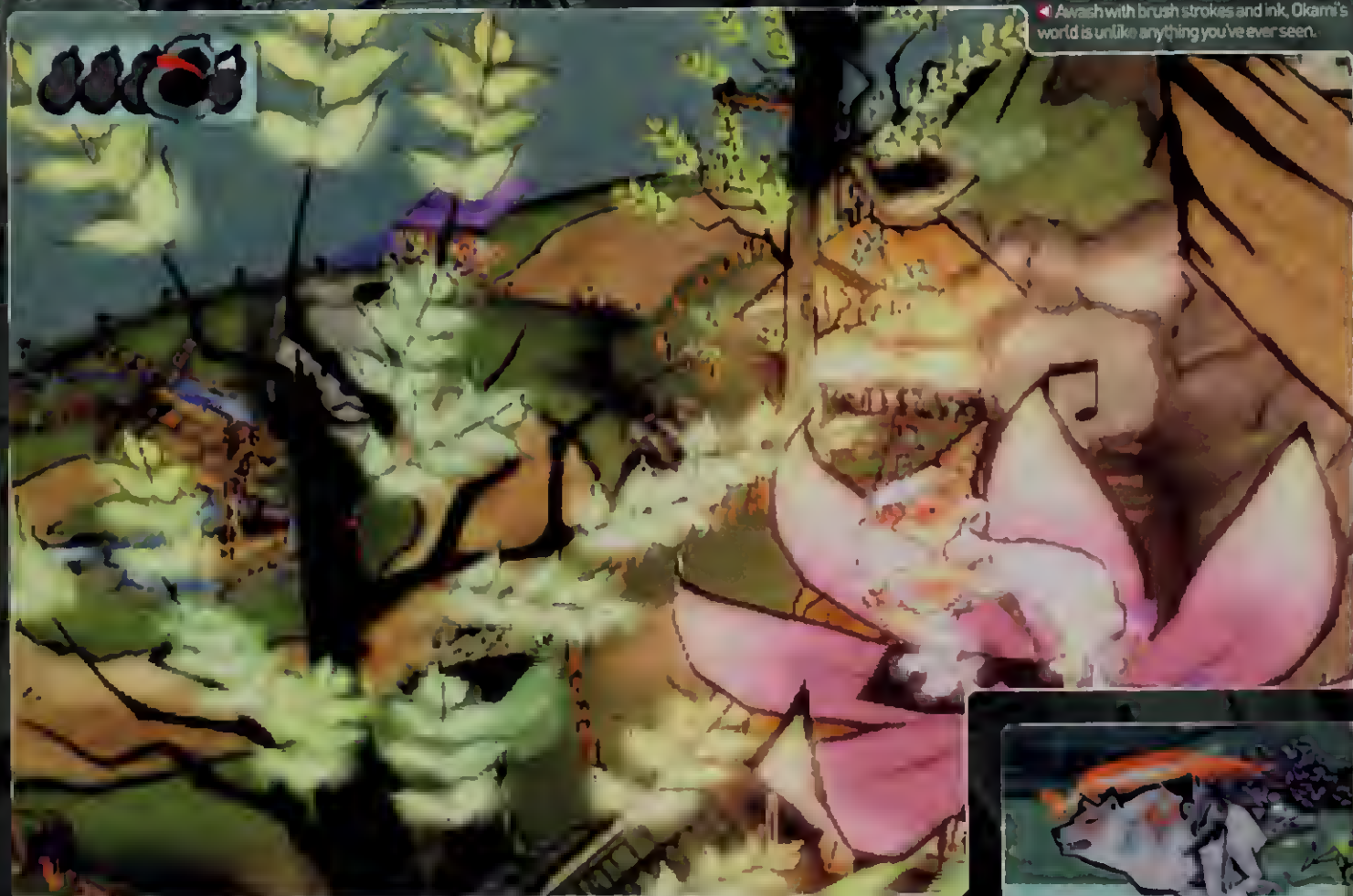
Hokenshitsu e Youkoso
We... even begin to quantify the wrongness here. Merely describing it in relation to have your name put in a national register. Keep moving...
Format PS2 Pub Princess Soft



Come On Baby
Who... up for a spot of newborn baby-based mini-game action? Don't look like that - this niche ain't going to make a profit on its own.
Format PS2 Pub Sonokong



Gallop Racer: Inbreed
Inbreed? So does the 1/21 racer boast pony abominations with two heads that gallop uncontrollably in ever-decreasing circles? Hope...
Format PS2 Pub Tecmo



◀ Awash with brush strokes and ink, Okami's world is unlike anything you've ever seen.

Fantasy adventure

Okami

A magical wolf paints a beautiful picture on PS2



Info

Format PS2 ETA 9 Feb
Pub Capcom Dev Clover
Studio Playora 1 Web
Okami.jp It's like Zelda
with painting wolves,
magic brushes and
gods.

So, I've just been taught how to slow down time by a boozed up sheep god. And you know what? It doesn't faze me in the slightest. I've already battled dogs that fight by coiling out explosive turds, sliced the wings off kimono-wearing fish, and killed a 50ft spider witch with a body made of flowers and eyeballs. Me? I'm a divine she-wolf; a sun goddess that can transform reality by painting on it with her tail – a drunk sheep teaching me bullet time is *normal*. This is the gloriously warped reality of Okami. Despite a plot that's barking in every sense of the word, it's easy to accept it because at its peak, Okami is innovative and creative gaming at its best: mixing traditional platforming with



▶ The heroine Amaterasu is a sun goddess summoned to medieval Japan as a wolf.



▶ Using the Celestial Paint Brush you can paint on the world around you to create different effects.

innovative ideas and Japanese art to create something both strikingly original and achingly beautiful.

Bristling with invention

Key to Okami's individuality (aside from its looks) is the Celestial Paint Brush: the wolf-god Amaterasu's main tool and weapon. Using her tail you can paint shapes or brush strokes to create objects and effects in the real world. These can include things such as simple slash attacks, made by drawing lines across an enemy, to the ability to control whether it's day or night by daubing

Can you guess what it is yet?

Painting makes things happen in Okami. Here are the best four scribbles to learn



Slash attack

You unleash a slash attack by drawing a line (or rather a simple horizontal stroke) across an opponent. This stroke is perfect for destroying weapons or cleaving foes in two.



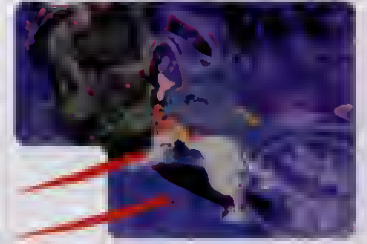
Lily pad

Draw a circle on water and you can create a huge floating leaf, complete with the occasional surprised frog. Use this to cross rivers, because swimming in water drains your power.



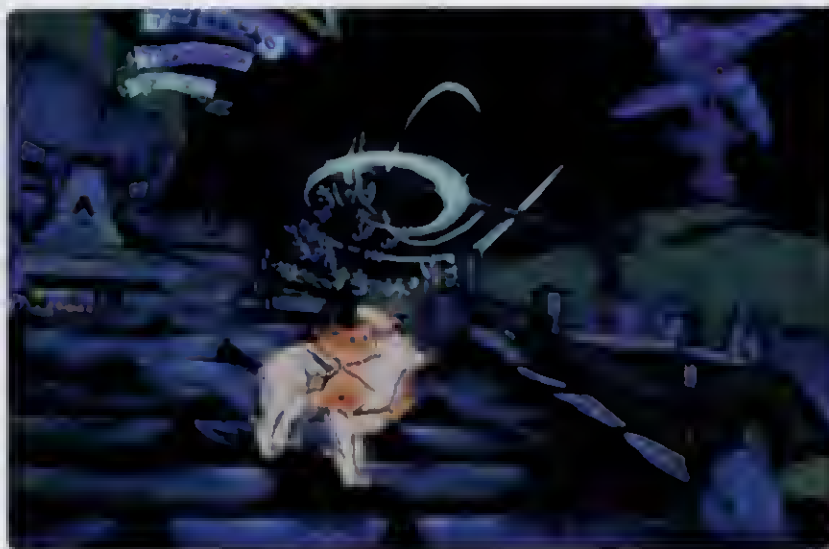
Cherry bomb

One of the more 'complicated' symbols, this enables you to produce an explosion. It's useful for stunning enemies, cracking weak walls and powering certain pieces of machinery.



Veil of mist

This powerful pattern lets you slow down time, giving you an unbeatable edge in combat, and helping you to do stuff like dodge moving barriers. It takes ages to get this power, though.



"We spent a while trying to find a woman's washing line before realising the idea was to draw one."

a sun or moon in the sky. In practice it's a brilliantly simple system. Press down **□** and the screen freezes, turning it into a flat, parchment image, enabling you to sketch out different symbols onto the flattened world.

It's mostly lines and circles, or combinations of the two, but the system is both intelligent and highly forgiving. The most cack-handed scribbles are recognised, while little coloured swirls of ink on-screen indicate what you can interact with, as well as telling you what skills to apply. Later on, this interface also enables you to control certain characters, so you can



instruct them to attack enemies or retrieve treasure, for example.

Incredibly, it's not as gimmicky as it sounds. Your artistic efforts quickly become the cornerstone of your interactions with the lavishly realised world. It does take a little mental adjustment to get the hang of it, though. Early on, we spent a while trying to find a woman's washing line before realising the idea was to draw a new one. It's possible to miss solutions because 'paint wind' isn't an answer that immediately springs to mind. Yet it becomes second nature after a while, and you end up splashing ink all over the place: slicing foes with a well placed line, drawing out streamers of fire to ignite

▣ The friends and enemies you meet change according to whether it's day or night.



▣ This is a statue of the legendary hero who first defeated the demon you've been asked to slay.



▣ Making these trees blossom - by drawing a circle around them - helps to exorcise evil from the land.

cannon fuses or illustrating lily pads to cross water. One ingenious puzzle has you sketching suns and moons to control the tides to reach different areas.

But this is a slow burning pleasure that will leave action freaks cold. Early adventures are confined to a small village and the surrounding region. Missions involve performing assorted tasks for the characters you encounter - a child challenges you to a hole-digging contest, for example. Additionally, a larger objective is to clear 'cursed zones' and restore peace by making various guardian trees blossom.

Death by paint brush

Combat does feature, but in a typically bizarre way. Rather than having creatures wandering around the landscape and attacking you, potential battles are

✓ All the characters you meet on your travels have something useful to say, or a job for you to do.



▣ These musical instrument-wielding demons need their strings cut before you can kill them.

Dev talk



"It's no fun making videogames like other people are making. It's just not my style."

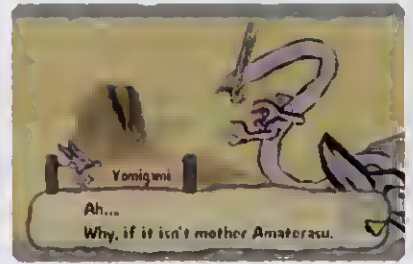
Atsushi Inaba
President
Clover Studio

The mix of charcoal and watercolour art combines to shape jaw-dropping locations and creatures. Brush marks, pen smudges and splashes of pigment swirl in front of your eyes creating a look that transcends anything else on PS2 or the next-gen.

But it soon becomes obvious that the first 12-15 hours of play are thinly stretched. New brush skills, areas and creatures can take ages to materialise. The gameplay bogs down into a repetitive grind as you tick off the many simple objectives and fight recurring battles with familiar foes.

It doesn't help that the plot barrels along with all the logic of a tramp shouting at passing cars. One minute there are simple A to B find-and-fetch missions, the next you're forced to make baffling leaps of faith between utterly unrelated characters and events. And it's not Japan-o-English culture shock, it's just bizarre. One oddball mission involves rescuing a dog by [deep breath] releasing a kidnapped sparrow, which enables you to reach a hot spring. Repairing

represented by floating demonic scrolls. You start a fight by running into a scroll, at which point you're surrounded by a circular barrier and your opponents appear. The fighting uses the brush brilliantly to mix traditional attacks with different painted strokes. Each enemy has weaknesses to exploit, that require special combos of ink-based attacks and traditional beatings to break their defences before finishing them. My initial reaction to all this design innovation was one of pure wonderment.



▣ Different gods appear and teach you how to use your Celestial Paintbrush as you explore.



▣ These gibbering monster gatelocks can only be opened by stabbing a holy arrow into their eye.



▣ You must master the power of wind to extinguish the fiery heart of this boss before attacking.

this spring then causes a god to appear who grants you the ability to 'paint' water. With this new skill you're then able to help a girl by filling her bucket. Having done all this, an entirely unrelated child, on the other side of the map, suddenly starts fishing. Now you can find the missing hound by catching the giant salmon that's eaten it. Oh. Sweet. Jesus.

The bigger picture

But, please, persevere. Spend the time and risk your sanity. Because wonderful things start to happen, if you can get past the 20-hour mark. For starters you'll have gained most (but not all) of your powers. You'll be slapping paint around, solving puzzles and attacking enemies, wondering how you ever managed to play games without brushes in them. At the same time the world begins to expand. Simple, single-event objectives are replaced with devious puzzles and longer, multi-part quests. The story also starts to feel more structured, rather than made up on the spot. And finally, the familiar green hilly environments are replaced by more inventive scenes: demonic underworlds appear, there are ghost ships to explore, and at one point you're even shrunk to the size of an insect and forced to run around

The Compel-o-Graph

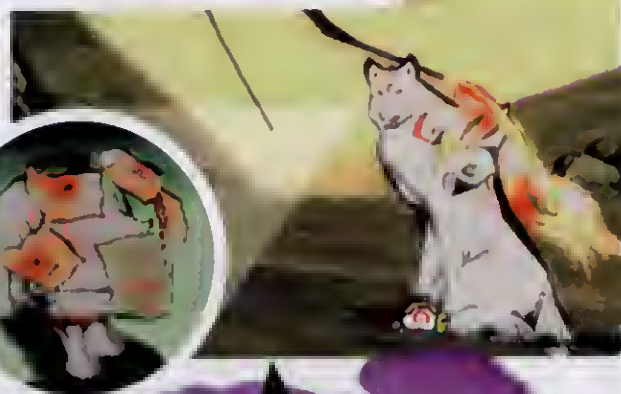
The highs and lows of Okami



❑ The fabulously twisted monster design takes influences from Japanese mythology and legends.



❑ You disguise yourself from demons by drawing a face on a scrap of paper. This was our mask (inset).



dodging house-sized feet and spiders to ensure your survival.

Boss battles offer an early taste of the pleasures ahead, providing teasing clues and head-scratching moments as you try to work out how to defeat the monstrosities you encounter. Even basic battles provide interesting challenges as you experiment with the various weapons and techniques at your disposal. For example, there are creatures who block your attacks with lutes (small Japanese guitars) until you paint a line across the strings to cut them. Elsewhere you'll find parasol-wielding bird spirits that need to be unbalanced with gusts of wind before you can kill them. As you work your way through and the plot progresses, the pace eventually picks up. The randomness and uncertainty is replaced with a far more focused story, and the back-and-forth wandering gives way to lightly scripted, stunning set-pieces.

It's such a shame that so many will be put off by Okami's slow start. The truth is that it's underwhelming at the beginning and then suddenly reveals its true colours. The later stages of the game blow the earlier sections away, and are definitely worth waiting for.

This is a game that only gives you the ability to double-jump somewhere around hour 23, which should give you some idea of the time needed to see it all. And special mention should go to the endless reams of text that deliver pages of dialogue, one un-skippable sentence at a



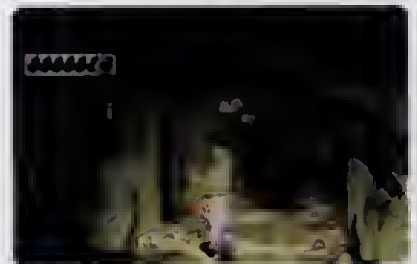
Name Ben Wilson
Angle Sports and action fan

"The opening 20 minutes of Okami – all arty Japanese sketches and mystical text – had me pining for Pro Evo, but things soon picked up, particularly once I'd mastered the cuckoo 'paint bridges and stars and suns to progress' premise. It's unlikely that I'd play it over a decent sports game, but even so, the four-year-old in me loved roaming around barking at things just for the childish amusement of it all."

Best for...
A three-night rental



❑ Point the game camera in any direction and you'll create an image you could hang on your wall.



❑ You're reduced to the size of an insect in one level, and must avoid spiders while exploring a garden.



Did you know?

Okami's visuals were originally meant to be photo realistic but the developer switched to a painted style when they realised PS2 couldn't achieve the look.

time. Stick with it though and you'll discover love and attention visible in every inch of its design. This isn't a game that presents a few bright ideas in the first level and then recycles them endlessly. It's not afraid to keep some killer material back, adding significant new powers and major gameplay changes hours into the tale.

Because of this Okami is not only capable of entralling you long after other titles have been traded in, but it also remains captivating throughout and is unlike anything you've experienced before on PS2. **Leon Hurley**

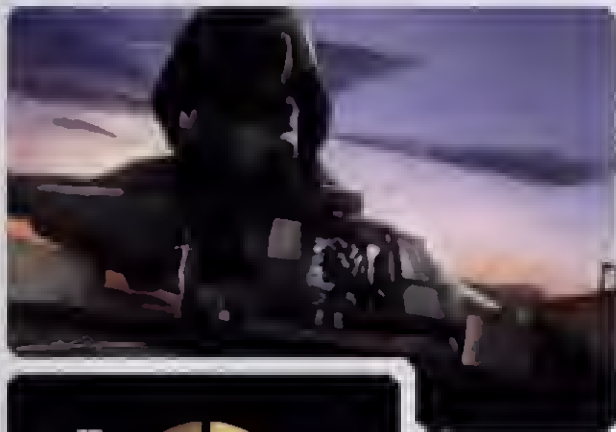
PlayStation.
Official Magazine UK

9

Tactical FPS

Rainbow Six Vegas

The war on terror goes small fry in this sharp PSP shooter



It's just a two-man team, but each operative boasts distinctive weapons and skills.

Take to the rooftops and you can pick off guards with a sniper rifle from a safe distance.

Rainbow Six Vegas rappels onto PSP as a companion to its highly anticipated PS3 counterpart. The scenario is the same – terrorists are out to poison the Las Vegas water supply – but Vegas PSP follows the team supporting the PS3 game's main strike force.

Set in the outskirts of Slot City, you skip between commando Brian Armstrong and sniper Shawn Rivers. They're a Special Ops tag-team that operates autonomously – Armstrong handles the basements while Rivers picks 'em off from the rooftops.

Controls-wise, Vegas compensates well for the lack of a second analogue stick – the nub is used to move, the face buttons to target, the R button to fire and the D-pad to reload. It's a simple, effective setup, that's only compromised by a few collision detection problems with doors that had the boys fumbling unprofessionally.

One new tactical element is



the evolution of Splinter Cell's Snake Cam – a microscopic camera you can use to scope out the other side of closed doors. Now it comes with the ability to tag wandering guards, meaning you can follow their movements via a floating icon and choose your moment to strike.

Six-person multiplayer brings up the rear, featuring net and LAN fragging with two modes – Survival and Team Survival

– over a greatest hits package of six of the series' best maps. The result is a solid if slightly sterile tactical shooter. Good, but let's hope PS3 Vegas packs more pizzazz. **Louis Pattison**



Cue pusher

World Snooker Championship 2007

So much more than a load of balls



Billiard sports have always translated well to games – from Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker back in the early '90s to Bankshot Billiards 2, arguably the finest offering in Xbox Live's Arcade library. WSC continues the trend.

The controls are easy to pick up yet offer plenty of spin and swerve options for the skilled player. It doesn't take long before you can fire off large breaks and bend your way out of snookers like a Crucible veteran. The slate of real-life tournaments (ten in all) offer depth, and you don't have to hang around waiting for your turn – CPU shots can be sped up or skipped altogether. Multiplayer games are even better than solo matches, mainly because the targeting is so blissfully simple.

Even a complete novice can quickly learn how to rattle off reds and blacks in quick succession, meaning you don't have to waste time teaching your mate the basics. It's not quite the same as playing over a pint in a half-lit hall that smells of stale booze and old leather, but you'll still gloat like an idiot when you nail a ton while they wince.

The downside is that the game has barely evolved from Codemasters' original World Championship Snooker game on PS1.

The best sports titles, such as Pro Evo and Madden NFL, have succeeded over the

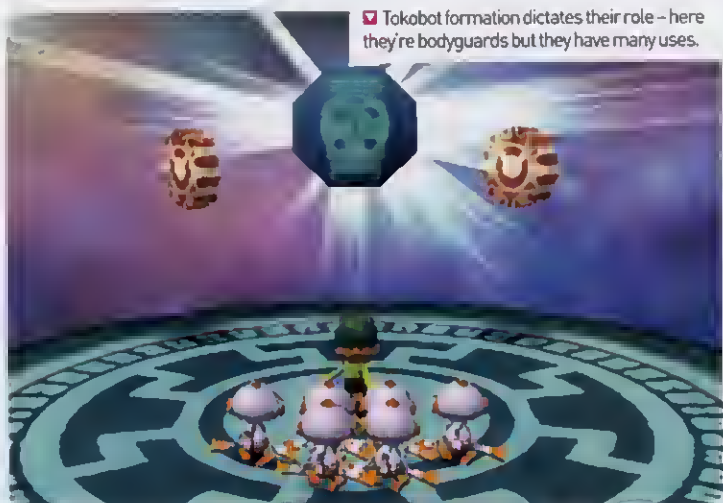
years by sticking to a winning formula but adding a handful of innovations each year. This series really needs to do the same, if it's to be truly compelling. **Ben Wilson**



A stack of targeting aids make the game instantly accessible to the inexperienced player.



Spot-on renditions of billiards and pool (great in multiplayer) are also included.



✓ Tokobot formation dictates their role – here they're bodyguards but they have many uses.

Robo-puzzler

Tokobot Plus: Mysteries Of The Karakuri

Small bots deliver platforms, puzzles and fun

An update of the PSP title released earlier this year, *Mysteries Of The Karakuri* emerges from behind obscure Japanese subtlety as a charming, inventive puzzler. You play as 16-year-old Bolt, a kid exploring the prehistoric ruins of Moritari for a laboratory and excavating the ancient technology found there – kind of a Young Indiana Jones with an anime twist. The technology recovered includes the Karakuri – a type of robot – and among those are the Tokobots, mini mechanicals which accompany Bolt on his travels.

The idea is to solve puzzles by exploiting the abilities of the Tokobots. For example, the bots can protect Bolt by surrounding him, or can make a ladder for him to climb by linking their metal arms. Though it's easy to begin with, ever more complex level design requires you to use a range of abilities and formations to navigate different areas. There's always a satisfying buzz when you match a problem to a corresponding ability, and once you factor in bright, friendly characters and levels, the game is pleasantly frustration-free, even during the hard bits. If there is a downside, it's

Info
Format PSP ETA Out Now Pub
Take Two Dev Team Players 1
Web tokobotgame.com
It's like Pokemon master Tetris in an ancient ruin.



✓ The cute little Tokobots perform their famous 'ladder' routine – linking their robot arms so Bolt can climb to higher levels.

that the additions to the PS2 version are slender to say the least. You get voiceovers for the RPG-style talking-head intro and info sections, an extra ten stages offering more of the same, and a new time attack mode enabling you to find extra treasure. Disappointingly, this last mode refreshes levels from the main game.

Owners of the PSP original will struggle to find value for money in this update, but Tokobot is well worth a look if you've never played it before. Refreshingly original and consistently rewarding, it's a smart and efficient puzzler.

Nathan Ditum



PlayList

Essential tunes to download this month

Natasha Bedingfield I Want To Have Your Babies

Format Track ETA 15 Jan Price £0.79

Aggressively maternal new single from the million-selling UK pop songstress and sister of popular ginger singer Daniel. *I Want To Have Your Babies* is the first taster of Ms Bedingfield's second album, *Black Canvas*, which is also due out late January. itunes.com



Fall Out Boy It Ain't A Scene, It's An Arms Race

Format Track ETA 29 Jan Price £0.79

Million-selling MySpace superstars they may be, but tattooed emo tykes Fall Out Boy rock with an energy that belies their history in the Chicago hardcore scene. *It Ain't A Scene, It's An Arms Race* is an irony-packed taster for their new album, *Infinity On High*, which follows in February. itunes.com



Evanescence Lithium

Format Track ETA Out now Price £0.79

Hark, Anne Rice fans and teens fond of dark clothing and pale complexion. The new single from Amy Lee's cobwebbed Arkansas goth-metal outfit builds on the operatic grandeur and visceral metal crunch of their UK chart-topper, *Bring Me To Life*. tescodownloads.com

Download of the month Klaxons Myths Of The Near Future

Format Album ETA 29 Jan Price £7.99

Debut album of tie-dyed, glo-stick-twirling fun from the hotly tipped frontrunners of the nu-rave scene. *Myths Of The Near Future* includes a cover of Grace's 1995 dancefloor anthem *Not Over Yet*, as well as band anthem *Atlantis To Interzone* and *Golden Skans* – the band's most pop moment to date. itunes.com



Info

Format PS2 ETA 16 February Pub Capcom Dev Clover Studio Players 1 Web capcom.com/godhand It's like Devil May Cry 3, if Dante swapped his sword for a blonic arm.



▲ Using combo moves in order to hit a group of opponents at the same time is often the only way to progress through the incessant waves of enemies.



▲ The radar at the top right of the screen shows you where your enemies are – though at times like this they're hardly difficult to spot.

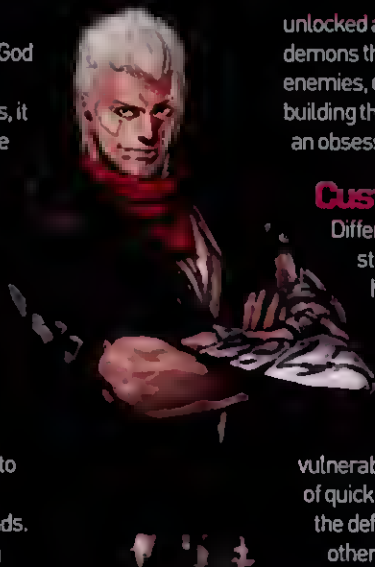
Magic-limbed beat-'em-up

God Hand

Or Devil May Cry Tears Of Laughter

Humour in games is rarely done well, so when the first videos of God Hand appeared, showing men getting repeatedly kicked in the chutneys, it seemed like this was just another corpse on the road to Funnygamestown. But there are two important things you need to know about this oddball Japanese fighter. Firstly, God Hand is genuinely pretty funny, and secondly (and more importantly), the humour is wrapped around a satisfyingly deep combat system that rewards skill but doesn't require you to risk RSI trying to master the button combos. In fact, there's only one combo to worry about: (○, ○, ○, ○, ○, ○)...

Though that's not as simplistic as it sounds. You build your own combos by picking which moves your repeated pushes of (○) activate from a menu. Moves are



unlocked as you go (either by defeating demons that appear randomly from fallen enemies, or by buying them in the shop), and building the ultimate combo soon becomes an obsession-stoking labour of love.

Custom spanking

Different moves have different strengths and properties, but you have to think carefully about which ones you use. There's no point including a devastating attack in the middle of your combo, for example, if it incorporates a pose or taunt that leaves you vulnerable. Some moves unleash a flurry of quick punches and kicks, some smash the defences of blocking enemies and others juggle and float your foes into the air. Dodge moves are mapped to the right analogue stick (the

camera is always centred on your character, but there's a quick 180° function on (△) and the all-powerful (○) button counters and activates finishing moves, such as suplexes, cobra twists and (cough) lady spanking.

The way these elements work in tandem allows for stunning fight sequences. The forward dodge makes you duck and weave, and it's always great fun to hammer

Five weird things to see



CHIHUAHUA RACING

Satisfy your gambling addiction by sticking a few bob on one of these prized pups, then laugh while they stumble their merrily ignorant way down the track.



MIDGET RANGERS

No need to guess where the inspiration for these pocket-sized mischief makers came from, and no limit to the joy you'll get from pounding their little heads either.



FAT ELVIS

A little less conversation, a little more action: this fat Mexican hound dog thinks he's The King, so get him all shook up with a hunka hunka of your burning (fist) love.



SEAFARING SCOUNDRELS

These pesky pirates attack you with cannon balls – stand your ground and use the God Hand to smash them straight back from where they came.



WRESTLING MONKEY

Two parts WWE musclehead Batista to one part King Kong, this dude likes bear hugging and packs serious power. Fortunately, he's even dumber than he looks.



With most bosses having absurdly brief recovery time, these battles can be as much a test of patience and nerve as they are about timing your moves.



The visuals may look average in still form, but seeing your man unleash a dazzling flurry of punches and kicks is very satisfying.



The circus levels see you having to battle past a wrestling monkey (see 'Five weird things to see in God Hand', above) and this evil clown.

"It's a world in which baddies trip up in their haste to pummel you. Where vixens wear razor-bladed traffic cones on their heads."

through a dream combo while timing your defence perfectly before closing with a devastating final attack.

You also have the awesome power of the God Hand at your disposal. (Story interlude: the God Hand is the magical mitt of a God, complete with awesome fighting powers and tattoos. It replaces your mortal hand that's carelessly amputated while you try to protect your girlfriend.) The Hand is activated when your God bar starts flashing, making your punches powerful and all but unblockable. Then there's the Roulette Wheel attack. This offers a limited time to select an insanely over-the-top special move, capable of decimating some bosses in two hits. Roulette Wheel moves can only be used when you have enough orbs – found in the item boxes that litter the

otherwise sparse environments. As with your fighting moves, you can customise which attacks appear on the roulette wheel, enabling you to pick the best face-rearranging super-move for any situation.

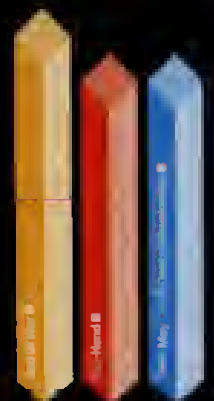
The call of the weird

All this depth is offset by the ludicrous game setting. It's a world in which baddies trip up in their haste to pummel you. Where vixens wear razor-bladed traffic cones on their heads, and midget wrestling Power Rangers form conga lines of doom. It's a world where you bet on dog races, only instead of greyhounds, you're cheering on tiny multi-coloured chihuahuas. It's like the Scary

Movie guys found themselves in charge of making a Capcom beat-'em-up, only God Hand is far funnier than that sounds. Just finding out what the game will throw at you next is reason enough to play on. It might be a rhythm-action mini-game where you have to punch cannon balls into a ship's mast, or a task from a leather-clad fairy to destroy an SUV, Street Fighter II-style.

The first hour of the game can be frustrating, and the graphics just about get the job done, but delve a little deeper and you'll be rewarded with gloriously unhinged action and a deeply satisfying fighting system. As punch lines go, this one's a cracker.

Jon Hamblin



Score Pole
In the same bracket as DMC, but still no match for the mighty God Of War



▲ When attacking enemies you often get more success from mashing the **Ⓢ** and **Ⓐ** buttons randomly than by actually trying to play strategically.



▲ Woeful collision detection problems frequently cause the screen to jerk around suddenly when Supes is performing linked melee attacks.

Movie tie-in action

Superman Returns

But we wish he hadn't bothered

There's a problem with Superman: he's too powerful. Think about it: how do you challenge the fastest and toughest man alive? EA's solution is to focus on protecting Metropolis. Taking the Man Of Steel's near-invulnerability for granted, it dispenses with ordinary health bars and instead tracks the city's wellbeing, with Supes on a continual mission to thwart

villains and avert natural disasters. Sadly, this is the only intelligent piece of design. Surrounding this sound premise is a game that is ugly and clumsy to control.

Take the bland and ugly recreation of Metropolis. The streets are unrealistically flat, the buildings are grey and featureless and the city has none of the buzz and energy that makes other open-world environments – Liberty City, say – feel alive. Besides which, the 'open-world' tag is a joke – game progress is marked by a linear succession of story-related chapters that are activated automatically. Yawn.

Lex and the city

The story itself is difficult to follow. Inspired by the basic narrative of the film, the game supplements cinematic baddie Lex Luthor with other villains to flesh out its story. The problem isn't so much the characters chosen –

Info

Format PS2 ETA Out now Pub EA Dev EA Tiburon Players 1 Web ea.com/superman_returns It's like Grand Theft Auto without the violence and with more flying.

Metallo, Mongul, Bizarro – but the way the additional material is clumsily integrated into the film's plot. For instance, only a few minutes into the game Superman recounts in flashback how he was abducted on his way back to Earth by Mongul and forced to fight in a gladiatorial arena on Warworld. So having just arrived in Metropolis, you find yourself playing through a lengthy sequence battling obscure villains on a planet only regular Superman readers will have heard of. This serious misjudgement disrupts the momentum considerably.

Then there are the controls. One of Returns' few successes is the way it captures the sensation of flying, nailing the power, grace and iconic arm-posing perfectly. Anything more complicated than this and the system fails. Super-speed is fine when travelling long distances, but in combat it's unwieldy. Close-combat controls – based on a system of unlockable combos – fare no better, with the fighting so unresponsive that it's often difficult to activate specific moves.

Visually unappealing, badly structured and an awkward pain to control, Superman Returns not only fails to exploit the huge potential of its star to deliver a worthy Superman title, but struggles to deliver a playable game at all.

Nathan Ditum

The Compel-o-Graph

The mediums and lows of a night in with Superman Returns

Metropolis is a joy

Except we're not really going that fast

Repetitive missions. More fires to put out, eh?


Warworld - ugly, sparse and unfamiliar

Make the hand-to-hand combat stop, please

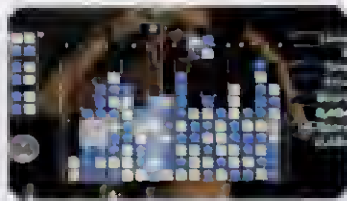
PlayStation.
Official
4

Lumines II

Format PSP ETA Out now Pub Buena Vista Games

 If you haven't experienced the dazzlingly original Lumines then here's the deal: coloured blocks fill the screen and, when enough are linked together, a moving bar sweeps them away in time to the music. It's an addictive, visceral experience, because each brick you clear creates a different sound – remixing the excellent soundtrack as you play.

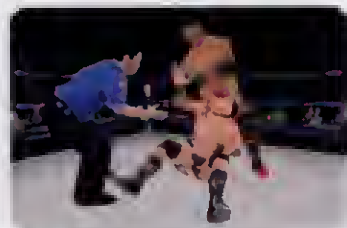
A major change this time is the addition of stars such as Beck and Gwen Stefani, who contribute tracks to the usual mix of dance and electronica. The new songs work well but the background




videos are off-putting. Elsewhere there's a wealth of fresh features, such as a music sequencer to create your own in-game tunes and a Mission mode that sets 'clear the screen in X number of moves'-style challenges. Adding further variety to an already excellent package are three difficulty levels with separate track listings. **Leon Hurley**

WWE Smackdown Vs Raw 2007

Format PSP ETA Out now Pub THQ




 Smackdown is well stacked for a PSP wrestler. It's got 67 realistically po-faced wrestlers, commentary from the same guys who broadcast on TV, and arenas from a year's worth of Pay-Per-Views. Crucially, it's also

evolved in the ring, with an improved control layout lending a more intuitive feel – particularly when you're ramming your opponent's mug into the ring-steps by pressing **↑** and **↓** on the nub.

The action is superbly supported by a revamped general manager mode that enables you to setup weekly shows and create feuds and long-running storylines between wrestlers. Prohibitive loading times will leave you wrestling with the idea of taking a hammer to your PSP, but this is still a commendably deep round of pretend fighting. **Ben Wilson**

Metal Slug Anthology

Format PSP ETA Out now Pub Ignition

 Forget tepid retro collections full of clag – this combines seven of the best side-scrolling shoot-'em-ups of all time: Metal Slug, Metal Slug 2, X, 3, 4, 5 and 6. They're difficult and occasionally repetitive, but the



detailed and expertly animated pixellated graphics lend considerable style. Most of all, it's furious fun that raises a smile with tongue-in-cheek humour: one level in MS3 turns you into a zombie and you destroy swathes of enemy by sickening up powerful jets of blood.

Lovely. **Andrew Kelly**



BluMovies

Feed that next-gen Blu-ray disc player



Black Hawk Down

Director Ridley Scott Starring Josh Hartnett, Ewan McGregor ETA 22 Jan

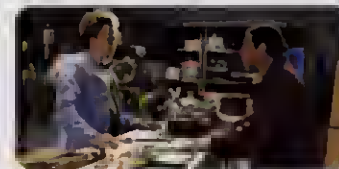
A platoon of 100 elite US soldiers fight a city full of Somali gunmen after a capture mission goes wrong. Don't be put off by the shonky first-person shooter series of the same name; this is an intelligent, tense and thrilling examination of modern warfare.



Monster House

Director Gil Kenan Starring Steve Buscemi, Maggie Gyllenhaal ETA Out now

Digitally transferred animations always look lush and Monster House is no exception. It's a knowing, adult-friendly take on kids' horror in which a creaky old residence turns out to be a living, breathing monster.



Click

Director Frank Coraci Starring Adam Sandler, Kate Beckinsale ETA 29 Jan

Hard-grafting architect Michael Newman (Sandler) neglects his family until he finds a remote that controls time and shows him what he's missing. As always the shouty lead is as smarmy as hell, but funny with it. And Beckinsale, in the role of Michael's wife Donna, smoulders from start to finish.

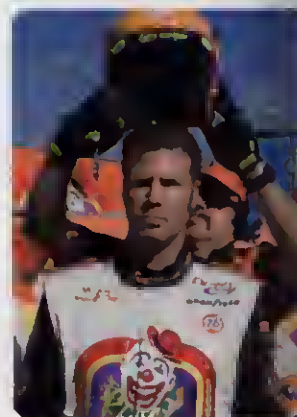


Movie of the month

Talladega Nights: The Ballad Of Ricky Bobby

Director Adam McKay Starring Will Ferrell, John C Reilly ETA 15 Jan

Top-dog NASCAR racer and man's man Ricky Bobby is threatened by the arrival of gay French racer Jean Girard. With this culture-clash rivalry providing most of the laughs – and there are plenty of them – this is a politically incorrect but achingly funny Ferrell showcase.

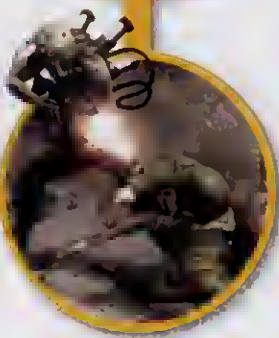


PSM3 is the UK's best-selling unofficial PlayStation magazine

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PS3 graphics meltdown
The Darkness delivers the next level of first-person excitement
page 20



Resistance makes the wait all worthwhile
The PS3's premium launch game gets ripped apart inside
page 52



PS3 is worth kipping on the streets for
What happened when we went to Japan and bought the second PS3 in the world
page 42



PS2 Larry reflects real life accurately
"Larry has to dress as a tree to seal the deal, but who hasn't been in that situation?"
page 88



MotorStorm: Is it really as good as the demo?
Or have Sony pulled the mud over your eyes?
Find out the truth
page 58

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Head to head

Star Wars: Lethal Alliance **VS** Star Trek: Tactical Assault

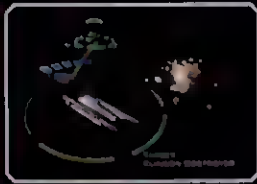
Two space legends, but which rules the handheld galaxy?

Set between movie episodes I and IV, this 3D action adventure follows tentacle-headed mercenary Rianna Saren as she carries out covert missions for the burgeoning Rebel Alliance. Your ultimate aim is to uncover details of the Empire's Death Star project.

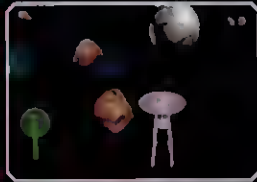
The films may have been state of the art in their day, but this is the opposite. Major faces are easily recognisable, but collision detection is awful and the camera bobs and weaves as though welded by a punch-drunk tramp on a bouncy castle.

Grimly unimaginative. Every genre cliché is here, from corridors protected by moving lasers via horribly persistent end-of-level bosses and frustrating precision jumps, to the presence of a helpful techy pal – in this case a robot named Zeeo.

Meeting characters like Princess Leia and Boba Fett will excite fans but the lifeless level design and barren approximations of recognisable Star Wars environments bring you back to Earth faster than the Millennium Falcon with Rio Ferdinand at the controls.



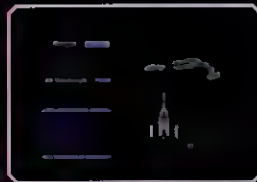
Take down evil Romulans and Klingons during the Starfleet campaign of 2284, then switch sides and oversee the Klingon empire from 2346 onwards. Progress is dependent on taking out rival ships using a mix of photon-firing action and strategy. Well, that's the idea.



Assault captures the feel of travelling through space with understated elegance. Stars shimmer in the distance, asteroids and planets hover menacingly, and there's a real feeling of loneliness during the times when you're not engaged in combat.



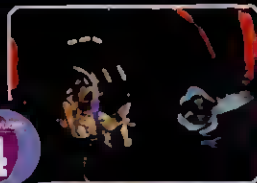
The strategic elements are little more than a series of tedious button presses – Select to engage shields and weapons, right shoulder to warp between areas. Taxing it is not. Still, the head-to-head battles with rival ships are fulfilling in meteorite-sized chunks.



Mission times are just short enough to make it perfect dip-in material, if you can overcome the glaring repetitiveness of it all. The ability to use ships unlocked in solo mode when going WiFi against your mates provides an incentive to complete the single-player missions.

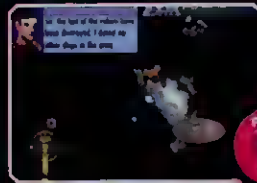
LOSER

If life really was this boring in the prelude to A New Hope, it's no wonder old Ben Kenobi took flight to the deserts of Tatooine. At least there he could have a good laugh at the hilarious-looking Sand People and their funny donkey honking noises.



PlayStation 4

WINNER



While the tactical options are primitive, a wide array of ship upgrades and some frenetic blasting battles save this from being cast out into oblivion. It's far from perfect, but it is superior to Lethal Alliance in just about every way possible.

PlayStation 6



▲ This is one of the better-looking games on PSP. Shame the gameplay is a bit rough.

First-person shooter

Medal Of Honor: Heroes

The shortest war ever fought



Info

Format PSP ETA Out now Pub EA Dev EA Canada Players 1-32 Web uk.electronicarts.com/games/0276 It's like Previous Medal Of Honor games clumsily recycled.

While PSP has struggled to produce a decent shooter so far, this is definitely a more successful attempt. Switch it on and in seconds you'll be shooting Fritz's face off. It works because it forgets all about complex narratives or level design. Instead, you carry out simple missions, reliving the previously unseen exploits of characters from the earlier Medal Of Honor Nazi-baiting adventures.

As you follow objectives, the action rarely strays from one central theme: emptying clips into relentless waves of Germans. And while using the PSP's face buttons as a substitute FPS right analogue stick will never be a perfect solution, it does

feel like a decent compromise in this case. Once things kick off it's possible to forget about the controls entirely - the heat of battle ignites, the blood-lust takes over and suddenly headshots are all that matter.

Blow out the barrel

This no-messing approach is both Heroes' strength and weakness. Fire it up for two minutes and you'll get a dense bout of intense combat, but extended battles soon expose the single-note gameplay. The levels, full of hidey-holes and vantage points, have clearly been designed for online matches and then filled with basic objectives to create a shamefully brief (and for 'shamefully' read 'four hours long'), single-player campaign. Whether your mission is to collect documents or destroy a gun emplacement, it's all just a thinly veiled excuse to dash from one side of the map to the other, drilling the enemy along the way.

Later Heroes' levels give up any pretence of being single-player at all by becoming Capture The Flag matches. Here you run around the map securing territory to 'win'. You're effectively playing an offline multiplayer game against the



The action
No fuss, no messing. Just press start and you're straight into the action. It's fast, relentless and very entertaining.



The multiplayer
With 32 players online and six different game types, this is one of the best multiplayer games available on PSP.

LOVING

HATING

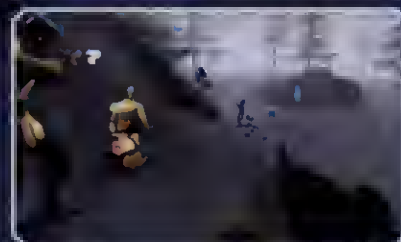
The shallow gameplay

There's no real story or proper objectives, so once you've shot your first German you've clocked the entire game.

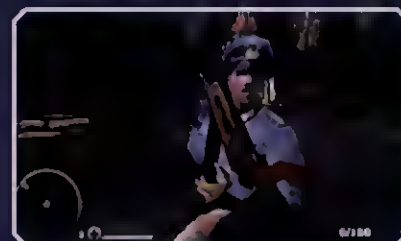


The grenades

Press on the right stick to get the pineapple out is a tricky pass in the end, then when you throw they practically



▲ A magic band of constantly respawning soldiers accompany you on most missions.



▲ The enemy are worthy opponents, using cover and weapons effectively. Not exactly Brad Pitt, this one.



computer and its CPU-controlled Third Reich. It feels a bit pointless, as does the story, which consists of little more than a gravelly voice saying, "You remember that time when..." at the start of every level. The instantly accessible blasting has its charms, but only in small doses. So it's particularly galling when the single-player missions finish just as you're getting stuck in.

Decent 32-player online multiplayer skirmishes bulk out the package, but the lack of any real substance or diversity means true glory eludes Heroes.
Leon Hurley

PlayStation Official

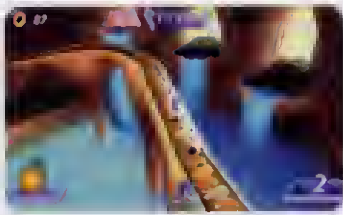
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Sonic Rivals

Format PSP ETA Out now Pub Sega

We always knew Sonic was a proud and greedy creature – no amount of coins was ever enough for him. Sonic Rivals proves his mates are no different. The villainous Dr Eggman has kidnapped a bunch of Sonic's pals and locked them inside a pack of playing cards, but instead of ganging together against the common foe, Sonic has to race both pals and enemies in order to save his friends.

The gameplay is classic Sonic, with the addition of a clutch of special power-ups, while the presence of a competitor lends Rivals a



sense of nail-biting competition – but the regularity of the photo finishes suggests there's a piece of catch-up code somewhere that needs a tweak. Match fixing? Sonic might be ultra competitive, but we'd like to think he's honest. **Louis Pattison**



Prince Of Persia: Rival Swords

Format PSP ETA 12 Jan Pub Ubisoft

Controlling the camera should never form a key gameplay feature. It's like going on a cruise only for the captain to ask whether anyone else fancies steering. This is the main problem with this handheld conversion of The Two Thrones. There are many perspectives from which you can view the Prince's surroundings, but with so many options, tasks as simple as leaping on to a balcony can become distressingly tricky.

It's a shame as this is a challenging action adventure, which squeezes in the thrilling mystical story, decent combat and original level



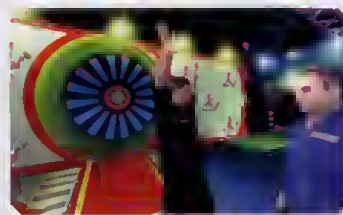
designs from its PS2 big brother. But the PSP can't cope with the epic vision of the 3D Prince Of Persia experience. The screen is too small for those cavernous locations and the save points are miles apart, so grabbing five minutes of commute-killing action simply isn't an option. **Keith Stuart**



PDC World Championship Darts

Format PS2 ETA Out now Pub Oxygen

Just as FIFA painstakingly creates pixel-perfect versions of football stars and floodlit stadiums, PDC World Championship Darts has clearly laboured hard to capture accurately the sweaty, barrel-bellied men of darts and the dingy clubs in which they ply their trade. The all-important throwing action is controlled with a simple Tiger Woods-like swing of the right analogue stick. Pull back on it to fill a 'dart bar' before pushing forward to release the shot. You can target freely on the board



itself, and the accuracy of your shot depends on filling the bar to an optimum level. Granted, it's familiar stuff, but the authentic arrow-tobbing mechanic provides a likeable, challenging game. **Nathan Ditum**



Straight to bargain bin

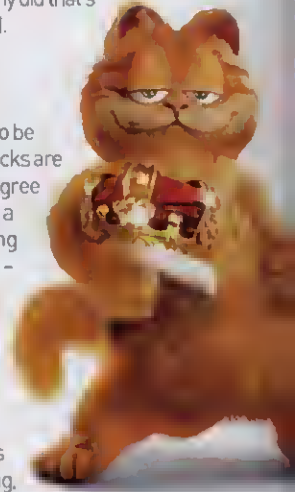
With Paul Roundell



"Who's going to pick this up and run with it?" asks Five Live commentator Alan Green for the sixth time in about a minute in **Virtua Pro Football** as I prepare to exercise my bile duct in a manner befitting wretched software. But wait! The commentary is better than Pro Evo's and wasn't I just sort of semi-enjoying the silly but in-depth player development mode? Importantly, I'm *not* enjoying the one-strength passing or the swamp-wading player speed or, for that matter, the thought that every second spent playing this dated, derivative effort is

another not spent with PES, FIFA, or even that one Sony did that's so nondescript no-one can remember what it's called.

Garfield 2's cellophane-wrapped arrival on my desk suggests reluctance on the part of team OPM to sully themselves with its dubious contents, yet it turns out to be surprisingly unatrocious. Double-jumps and spin attacks are not the stuff of platforming revolution, but there's a degree of charm to this easy game, despite the best efforts of a cast of voice actors more suited to accountancy training films. Rhythm-action, collection, chasing, exploration – the missions are an exercise in box ticking. And yet, coupled with bright (if below par) graphics, crispish controls and a simple structure, they provide a decent if not-thrilling few hours of entertainment for the under tens and mentally impaired.



In contrast to Garfield, the voice work in **Teen Titans** is excellent. In contrast to anything worth actually playing, the excellence ends there, and every other feature of this patchy scrapper is a limp celebration of mediocrity. Multiplayer arenas demand tight cameras but what's on offer is a faraway view of tiny fighters – meaning imprecise inputs and wishy-washy gameplay that would bore the pants off a professional paint watcher. Achieve the same effect by buying two mice, getting them drunk, sticking cheese to their ears, putting them in a shoe box in your garden and watching them slug it out from an upstairs window. It's along the same lines, but slightly more fun and considerably cheaper. And no, I'm *not actually* suggesting you do this, just like I'm not *actually* suggesting you play Teen Titans to experience the voice acting.



Abomination of the month

As love and marriage are to a horse and carriage, so extreme metal and racing go together, it turns out, like a crawling infant and a carpet of broken glass. A game with these execrable loading times should reward saint-like patience. Instead, I'm assaulted by a soundtrack of hoarse lunatics yammering unintelligibly as crudely rendered, motorised chariots lurch around with all the finesse of supermarket trolleys. There is no brake (save for a handbrake), no on-screen indication of pack position, no way to pause, even. There's no reason to own **Earache Extreme Metal Racing** except to smash it with hammers.



Pro Evolution Soccer 6

Like Arsenal, genius and frustration from the same team



Despite retiring last summer, Zidane (back, right) is still featured.

Depressingly, Arsenal and Manchester United are the only licensed English sides in the game.

The opportunity to play Pro Evo – long considered the finest football experience this side of swapping bodies with Ronaldinho – on the move was one of the main reasons everyone got so excited about PSP in the first place. So it was incredibly frustrating when PES5 emerged in late 2005 with a wonky main camera and no Master League – the PS2 version's star attraction, in which you nurture players over countless seasons. Suddenly PSP Pro Evo slipped from 'potentially brilliant' to 'definitely broken'.

PES6 delivers major changes. The new 'wide' view and better nub responsiveness succeed in creating the absorbing football title we expected a year ago; yet the token lines of commentary after each goal only highlight the gap between portable PES and its deeper, weightier PS2 brother.

Master League is included this time, and proves the best route to

Info

Format PSP/ETA Out now Pub Konami Dev Konami Players 1-2 Web <http://tinyurl.com/PS6> It's like PES5 in Pro Evolution 6, only with the bestie sorted this time.

long-term enjoyment. It's near-identical to the PS2 version, minus player development. Lack of authenticity remains a key problem, though, with just two licensed Premiership clubs. There is a deep edit mode, and the option to port over your PS2 option file – but you'll need both formats for that, and only blindly loyal fans (or rich fools) are likely to do that. Nonetheless, in terms of raw

playability this is a major step up from last year. In fact, the real problem is that extended play (and constant use of the right shoulder button) is likely to leave you with painful 'dribbler's knuckle'. **Ben Wilson**



Football Man Handheld 2007

Format PSP/ETA Out now Pub Sega

Long considered the best football management game on PC, 'Footyman' is now building a similarly imperious reputation on handheld. While the PSP version strips down some of the features of its heavyweight counterpart – only ten nations are playable, and there are no reserve or youth squads – it still does more than enough to keep you hooked.

The neat interface is a breeze to navigate, despite the plump wealth of facts and figures on offer, while every commentary-based match is an exhilarating three-minute test of nerve and tactical nous. The scope for both short and long-term play is immense.



Ben Wilson



Rayman Raving Rabbids

Format PS2/ETA Out now Pub Ubisoft

Rayman has been captured by a rabble of mental rabbits and is forced to compete in challenges for their amusement. That's all the storyline you get. This is clearly the product of a twisted mind, and doesn't suffer for it.

Originally designed for the new Wii controls, heavy use of the PS2's analogue sticks makes for some frantic action. Each level is a gladiatorial arena with doors leading to mini-games. These vary from shooting and racing, to slamming toilet doors, and they reach horrid levels of difficulty. It can get repetitive with over 70



ineane tests in all, but come with an open mind and you'll have a laugh. **Rachel Weber**

Bliss Island

Format PSP/ETA Out now Pub Codemasters

Placing you in control of a fluffy blue blob in a wide variety of mini-games based on his ability to puff air from his snout, Bliss Island is sort of fun. And yet, versions of the games on offer here are freely available online.

Joel Snape



Dungeon Siege: Throne Of Agony

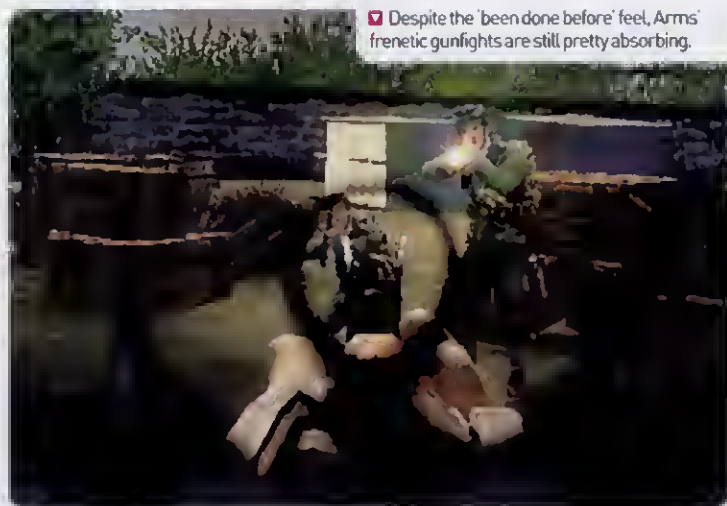
Format PSP/ETA Out now Pub Take Two Games

This action RPG is based on Dungeon Siege, a series of strategy role-playing games popular with PC gamers and pretty much no-one else. For Throne Of Agony it's been scaled down for PSP and made much more accessible. Or at least that's the theory.

Choosing from four pre-set characters – all of whom can be upgraded and levelled-up to a seemingly limitless extent – your task is, predictably, to scour dungeons and kill hordes of monsters.

It's playable and nice looking but its pace is sedate, which won't suit anyone looking for some fast-paced, on-the-go gaming. Patience really is a virtue with this. **Andrew Kelly**





Despite the 'been done before' feel, Arms' frenetic gunfights are still pretty absorbing.

Wartime shooter

Brothers In Arms: D-Day

Guns, grenades and gut wounds

If Medal Of Honor is PlayStation's Saving Private Ryan then Brothers In Arms is its Thin Red Line. Under-appreciated, less showy, but intelligent and often superior to its big-budget rivals, D-Day might suffer from the usual complaints about PSP first-person shooters – holding down **○** to free-look initially feels awkward and the strafing controls can be vague – but once you've acclimatised to the controls the game gets easier.

This is partly down to Brothers In Arms' helpful on-screen markers. Nazis are marked with giant red dots – the sort of thing that would seem ridiculous on PS3, but which proves invaluable on PSP when you're trying to pick out a pixel-wide grey helmet behind a brown hedge. It's also down to the forgiving Normal difficulty setting. If you've got any experience with shooters you'll breeze through the first half-dozen levels with a chestful of medals. But mainly, it's thanks to the simple but absorbing team dynamics and rigid-but-fun level design. Sending your brave boys and, in later missions, tanks into the fray is as simple as prodding **△**, and in comparison to the usual WW2 dimwits in games, your men are more than

Info

Format PSP ETA Out now
 Pub Ubisoft Dev Gearbox
 Software Players 1-2 Web
 brothersinarmsgame.com
 It's like The working men's
 Call Of Duty.



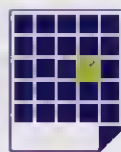
Once you've overcome the fiddliness of PSP's nub, targeting is reliable and accurate.

capable of taking care of themselves.

Planning your squad's movements in the bird's-eye map view before flicking back to execute them in first-person makes for a satisfying blend of action and on-the-fly strategy. And features like the suppression gauges – showing how terrified enemy units are by your firing – only add to your sense of control. In fact, unwieldy strafing aside, the only real criticism

we have of D-Day is the samey French countryside. But, in all fairness, that's down to history, not lazy design.

Joel Snape

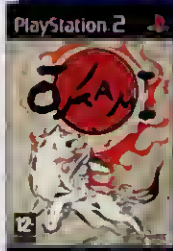


Release Schedule

Coming soon to a PlayStation near you

	Publisher	ETA	Format
Medal Of Honor: Airborne	EA	2 Feb	PS2
Rainbow Six Vegas	Ubisoft	9 Feb	PSP
Okami	Capcom	9 Feb	PS2
Championship Manager 2007	Endor	16 Feb	PS2, PSP
God Hand	Capcom	16 Feb	PS2
Test Drive Unlimited	Atari	16 Feb	PS2
Final Fantasy XII	Square Enix	23 Feb	PS2
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Take Two	23 Feb	PSP
Tony Hawk's Project 8	Activision	23 Mar	PS3, PSP
Samurai Warriors 2 Empires	KOEI	30 Mar	PS2
God Of War II	Sony	30 Mar	PS2
Bladestorm: The Hundred Years War	KOEI	Mar	PS3
Brian Lara Cricket 2007	Codemasters	Mar	PS2
Call Of Duty 3	Activision	Mar	PS3
Fetal Inertia	KOEI	Mar	PS3
Fight Night Round 3	EA	Mar	PS3
Full Auto 2: Battlelines	Sega	Mar	PS3, PSP
Formula One 06	Sony	Mar	PS3
Genji: Days Of The Blade	Sony	Mar	PS3
Madden NFL 07	EA Sports	Mar	PS3
Marvel: Ultimate Alliance	Activision	Mar	PS3
Motorstorm	Sony	Mar	PS3
Need For Speed Carbon	EA	Mar	PS3
NBA 2K7	Take Two	Mar	PS3
NHL 2K7	Take Two	Mar	PS3
Rainbow Six Vegas	Ubisoft	Mar	PS3
Resistance: Fall Of Man	Sony	Mar	PS3
Ridge Racer 7	Sony	Mar	PS3
SingStar	Sony	Mar	PS3
Sonic The Hedgehog	Sega	Mar	PS3
Stranglehold	Midway	Mar	PS3
The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion	Ubisoft	Mar	PS3
Tiger Woods PGA Tour Golf 07	EA	Mar	PS3
Tony Hawk's Project 8	Activision	Mar	PS3
Untold Legends: Dark Kingdom	EA	Mar	PS3
Virtua Fighter 5	Sega	Mar	PS3
Virtua Tennis 3	Sega	Mar	PS3
World Snooker Championship 2007	Sega	Mar	PS3
Colin McRee: OIRT	Codemasters	June	PS3
Grand Theft Auto IV	Rockstar	19 Oct	PS3
Assassin's Creed	Ubisoft	2007	PS3
Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots	Konami	2007	PS3

All release dates are accurate at time of press but liable to change.



READY MADE EXCUSE #11

Pull a sickie for...
Okami

“Uh, yeah... I've been up all night with stomach cramps. It's almost certainly food poisoning. So I definitely won't be in today. [Cough] Or tomorrow.”

**FREE
INSIDE**

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USERS GUIDE**
ADVICE & TIPS SECRETS
FROM THE WORDS

**WHY FINAL
FANTASY XII
IS PS2'S GAME
OF THE YEAR**

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PlayStation®ation®

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SECTION**

THE
GUITAR HERO II
OKAMI

PlayStation 3 goes to war

Resistance Fall Of Man: How to hunt aliens (and not get killed)
Why PS3 will own Wii and 360 in 2007 • Mercenaries 2 storms PS3

FIFA • Pro Evra alive and kicking on PS3
End of the road for Green T. Xbox • HD
iPods • mobiles • cameras • USB for PS3



UK launch latest line-up revealed
Wii • Xbox • PSP • PS3
BioShock, Dead Rising... and Mario?

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... powerful games mach

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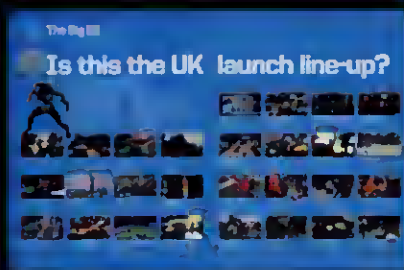
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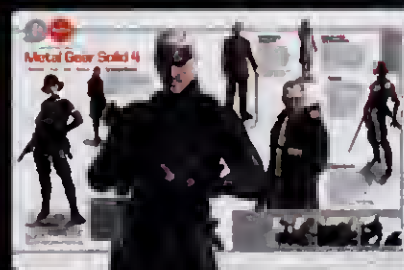
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Football finds the back of the net on PlayStation 3.



PS3 FAQ

All your burning PS3 questions comprehensively answered.



ALONE IN THE DARK

Turns out there *is* something hiding under the bed, in this PS3 shocker.



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Every game tested. Unbiased verdicts that are right on the money.

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PS2 Essential collection

Wondering what games you need to create the perfect PS2 collection? Wonder no more

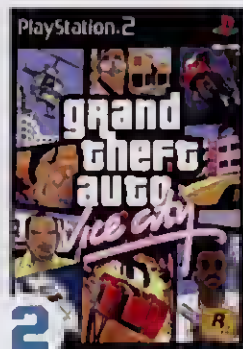


1

Survival-Horror
Resident Evil 4

Beautifully crafted third-person zombie slasher that's not only the standout game in its genre, but also the greatest game ever on PS2.

10 Pub Capcom
Dev Capcom Studio 4

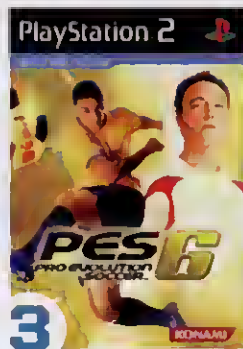


2

Free-Roaming
GTA: Vice City

Vast sandbox adventure that's stacked with gangsters, inventive missions, street action and cruising in your car to a brilliant '80s soundtrack.

10 Pub Rockstar
Dev Rockstar North

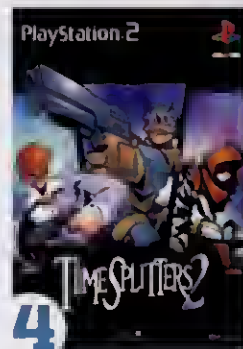


3

Sports
Pro Evo 6

An unrivalled recreation of football with brilliantly realistic passing and limitless multiplayer, this is a must for anyone who loves the game.

10 Pub Konami
Dev Konami



4

Shooter
TimeSplitters 2

Thrilling deathmatches set in different historical periods and in brilliantly devised comic book levels make this a hilarious multiplayer FPS romp.

9 Pub Eidos
Dev Free Radical Design



5

Action-Adventure
Ico

Indescribably pretty Japanese marriage of action, puzzles and adventuring in which you have to rescue a simple-minded lady ghost. Weird, yet irresistible.

9 Pub Sony
Dev SCEI Japan Studio



6

Music
Guitar Hero

Trade your DualShock for a plastic axe and mangle your fingers to hits by Ozzy Osbourne, Queen and Franz Ferdinand in this revolutionary rockfest.

9 Pub RedOctane
Dev Harmonix

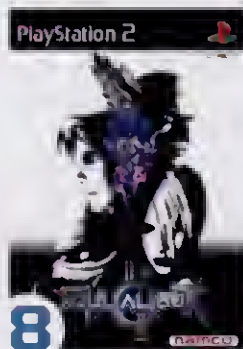


7

Racer
Burnout Revenge

Unfathomably fast racer that's completely riotous in multiplayer (both local and online) as you're rewarded for smashing mates' motors off the road.

9 Pub Electronic Arts
Dev Criterion

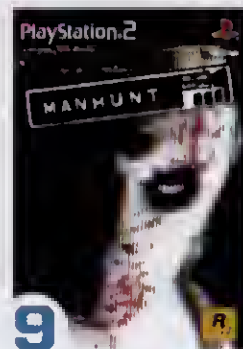


8

Fighter
Soul Calibur II

Astonishingly playable weapon-based fighting game, whose reputation stems from its flowing movement system and deliciously intuitive combos.

9 Pub Electronic Arts
Dev Namco



9

Stealth
Manhunt

Three levels of stealth kills - hasty, violent, and gruesome - using weapons like glass shards, make this a deliciously twisted and compelling adventure.

9 Pub Rockstar
Dev Rockstar North



10

Role-Player
Dragon Quest: The Journey Of The Cursed King

Lovingly crafted RPG stacked with lavish visuals, appealing characters, and over 90 hours of immersive gameplay.

9 Pub Square Enix
Dev Level-5

PS2 Horror

Silent Hill 2
Absolutely terrifying levels of psychological horror in an adventure that has to be played with the lights on.

Project Zero
Face a horde of Japanese ghosts with avert just a mystical camera and nerves of steel.

Resident Evil 4
Classic zombie butchery reinvented as a twitchy heavy action classic soaked in gritty atmosphere.

Haunting Ground
Use your poodle dog to attack enormous henchlocks and try not to faint too often as you explore a predictably spooky old house.

Reader Choice



God Of War

My favourite PS2 game would have to be God Of War. It has brilliant, slick and intuitive gameplay, the best graphics on PS2 and a musical score that could challenge any film to date."

Cillian McGillicuddy
Co Cork, Ireland

DualShock
Feel that rumble feedback when you spraylead or go off road

Massive choice of games
The widest range of software on any console, including brilliant party games like Buzz, EyeToy and Dancing Stage Max

Dirt cheap
Only £90? Now there's no excuse for not having one in every room of the house.

PlayStation 2



11 Stealth Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater

The latest entry in a never less than gripping stealth action series, combining inspired jungle sneaking with a great plot

9 Pub Konami
Dev Kojima Productions

PlayStation 2

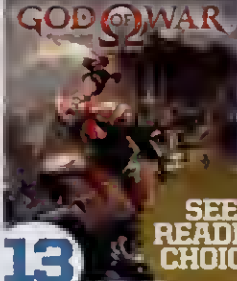


12 Shooter Black

Short at just eight levels, but still a must for anyone seeking relentless, sensory overload gunplay at its most intense – and most spectacular.

9 Pub Electronic Arts
Dev Criterion

PlayStation 2



13 Action-Adventure God Of War

Part-puzzler, part-adventure and part-fighter. Clever use of mythology and a granite-hard lead character combine to make this an essential epic.

9 Pub Sony
Dev SCE Santa Monica

PlayStation 2



14 Racer Gran Turismo 4

Smooth to play and sharp to look at, with more than 100 eye candy courses and over 700 officially licensed cars. PS2's best racer – often imitated, never bettered

9 Pub Sony
Dev Polyphony Digital

PlayStation 2



15 Survival-Horror The Silent Hill Collection

Compendium of Silent Hills 2, 3, and 4 – all horror adventures dripping with gore, monsters, puzzles and scary effects.

9 Pub Konami
Dev Konami

PlayStation 2



16 Stealth Hitman: Blood Money

Featuring even more sick kills and a genuinely stunning twist, the bald assassin's most recent outing is also his darkest.

9 Pub Eidos
Dev IO Interactive

PlayStation 2

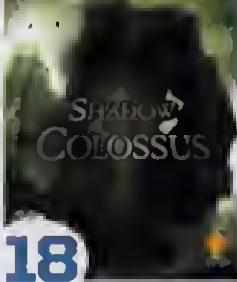


17 Music SingStar Rocks!

A karaoke killer that sticks a mic in your hand, cracks on Queen's Don't Stop Me Now! and screams "Wake up neighbours it's only 3 in the morning!"

9 Pub Sony
Dev SCE Studios London

PlayStation 2



18 Action-Adventure Shadow Of The Colossus

Commendably original adventure in which you battle 16 huge beasts armed with only a sword, a bow, and a horse

9 Pub Sony
Dev SCE1 Int Studio 1

PlayStation 2

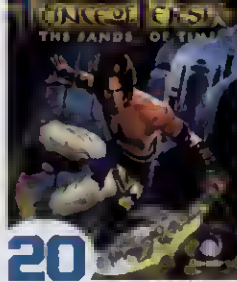


19 Free-Roaming Mercenaries

A fantastic combat sandbox full of tanks and guns. Dive right in to a world of high-explosive chaos: blasting baddies and spraying lead until your heart's content.

9 Pub LucasArts
Dev Pandemic Studios

PlayStation 2



20 Action-Adventure Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time

Climb the walls and defy time in the best of the finely coiled Iranian royal's free-flowing acrobatic adventures.

9 Pub Ubisoft
Dev Ubisoft Montreal



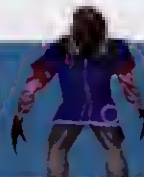
Manhunt

Stealth slaughter that utilizes common household objects like plastic bags and meat cleavers. Grisly and gritty.



Forbidden Siren

Zombie swisher with a handy 'jacking' ability enabling you to see through diabolical dead eyes.



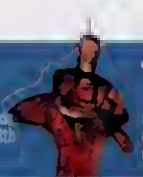
The Thing

Not only do you have to worry about aliens hijacking the bodies of your squad, but you've also got to keep them sane.



Cold Fear

It's Real Evil on a sea-tossed boat as a US Coastguard board a Russian vessel crawling with flesh-ripping mutants.



The Suffering

Hang on to the coop as you attempt to fight your way out of a prison twisted with the depths of hell.



PSP Essential collection

20 indispensable games for your handheld - try them or buy them, just make sure you play them



1
Platformer
LocoRoco

Tilt a 2D world to guide a growing, smiley-faced blob to safety while sugary Japan-o-pop tickles your ears. Rolls all over Me & My Kataman.

10 Pub Sony
Dev SCE Studios Japan



2
Puzzler
Lumines II

Move blocks and clear the screen to a brilliantly eclectic soundtrack. New features and modes improve an addictive fusion of music and puzzling.

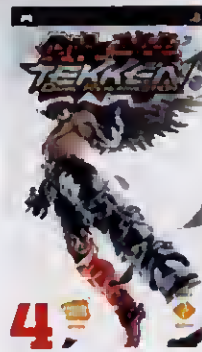
9 Pub Guena Viet a
Dev Q Entertainment



3
Free-Roaming
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City Stories

Everything you'd expect from GTA, only smaller. Compelling missions, on foot or behind the wheel, plus plenty of '80s tunes.

10 Pub Rockstar
Dev Rockstar Leeds



4
Fighter
Tekken: Dark Resurrection

With stunning looks, loads of mini-games and new moves, this offers some of the best multiplayer action on PSP.

9 Pub Sony
Dev Namco Bandai



5
Third-Person Action
Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror

Bond-style espionage action that gives both Snake and Fisher a run for their money. Great gadgets and intuitive controls.

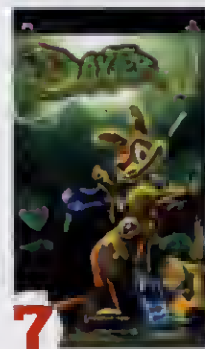
9 Pub Sony
Dev Sony Band



6 namco
Racer
Ridge Racer

Power-slide around a mix of classic and new tracks. A great arcade racer where teasing out a perfect drift through a corner at 135mph never gets dull.

9 Pub Namco Bandai
Dev Namco Bandai



7
Platformer
Daxter

Jak's weasel-faced sidekick goes bug-hunting. Designed for PSP from the ground up - this is a good-looking adventure with loads of variety.

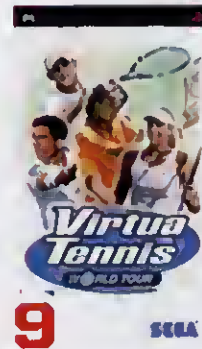
9 Pub Sony
Dev Ready At Dawn Studios



8
Third-Person Action
Killzone: Liberation

A savage third-person shooter that sees you fighting a future war on a barren planet. Brilliant weapons and vehicles.

8 Pub Sony
Dev Guerilla Games



9 SEGA
Sports
Virtua Tennis World Tour

Instantly rewarding, racket-twanging action thanks to simple and responsive controls that take seconds to pick up.

8 Pub Sega
Dev Sumo Digital



10 EA
Racer
Burnout Legends

Remix edition of the crashtacular racer. All the best tracks and vehicles from every game so far come together in one big, gloriously slow-mo smash-up.

8 Pub Electronic Arts
Dev Criterion Games

PSP
Puzzlers

Me & My Katamari
Roll your sticky ball around crazy landscapes as the seasons change in a unique OCD-inducing object collection game.

Lumines
Saving the PSP with addictive block-matching gameplay, fun sound effects and toe-tapping tunes.

LocoRoco
Fatten up your happy little blob and traverse taxing environments using just two buttons and the magic of gravity.

Mercury
Shiny puzzler that requires a steady hand to guide liquid metal around an obstacle stream labyrinth.

Team Choice

Me & My Katamari

we've just discovered this ball-rolling beauty, and it's as addictive as breathing. There's nothing better than watching a sticky ball of junk grow enough to pick trees, whales eventually, cities.



Rachel Weber
Writer

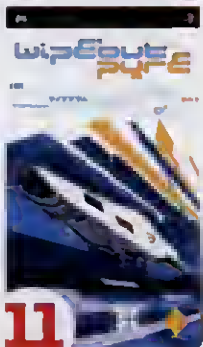
Get connected
Hook up to a PS3 or PC. Now you can transfer music, movies, pics, games and more.

Screen
PSP packs more power per polygon than PS2, and this little screen can cope with video too.

Wireless
The magical switch that opens up the web for on-the-go net browsing and multiplayer.



Storage
Get up to 4GB of memory with a Memory Stick that stores your photos, tunes and video.



11 Wipeout Pure

Sci-Fi Racer
Sony's techno-racer speeds back to the top with stylish tracks and hull-rupturing weaponry. Plus, there's loads of downloadable content.

8 Pub Sony
Dev SCE Studios Liverpool



12 Pro Evo 6

Sports
Captures the intricate pass-move-score genius of the PS2 version, and the newly-added Master League mode makes spare time evaporate.

8 Pub Konami
Dev Konami



13 TOCA: Race Driver 3 Challenge

Racer
From NASCAR to Rallycross, virtually every kind of motoring you could want, recreated in this accessible, balanced simulation.

8 Pub Codemasters
Dev Codemasters



14 Lego Star Wars II: The Original Trilogy

Platformer
Retelling of the best three Star Wars movies in Lego. Play it for the platform fun or the hilarious spoofs of classic scenes.

9 Pub LucasArts
Dev Traveller's Tales



15 Tony Hawk's Underground 2 Remix

Sports
Hawk's suits the PSP perfectly. Dip in and practise one ramp or trick out entire free-roaming levels depending on your mood.

8 Pub Activision
Dev Shaba Games



16 Pursuit Force

Action-Racer
Chase down criminals in your souped-up rozzie-mobile and hijack their rides by jumping from one moving car to another. Ridiculously OTT racing action.

7 Pub Sony
Dev BigBig Studios



17 Field Commander

Real-Time Strategy
Like playing chess with massive tanks. Engrossing RTS that tests your smarts as you co-ordinate your army, navy and air forces across battlefields.

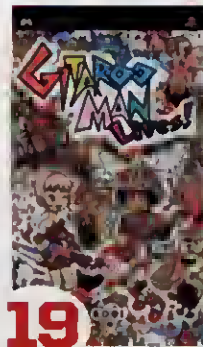
7 Pub Ubisoft
Dev Sony Online



18 Everybody's Golf

Sports
This is a serious golf game that's simple to play, but with hugely challenging courses to tackle. You can lose hours just chasing impossible birdies.

7 Pub Sony
Dev SCE Studios Japan



19 Gitaroo Man Lives!

Music Action
Mixes offensive and defensive musical battles, as a guitar-wielding hero saves the universe from the fikes of reggae robots and nappy-wearing monsters.

7 Pub KOEI
Dev Inis



20 Street Fighter: Alpha 3 MAX

Fighter
One of the best collections of combatants in any beat-'em-up. Classic, 2D, rapid-fire fighting with character depth and variety.

7 Pub Capcom
Dev Capcom

PSP Racers



Ridge Racer

A racer that's all about speed, power and drifting across the track like The Stig in a greased Gallardo.

NFS Carbon: Own The City

Street race your way to the city and then to the twisted canyon.

Burnout Legends

The best of the old Burnouts mixed with new features and scorable six-person WiFi multiplayer.

Wipeout Pure

Zero gravity, maximum thump space Sci-fi hover-wind racing with futuristic weapons and a techno soundtrack.



Next month in Official PlayStation Magazine

Assassin's Creed

Discover **the truth** behind PS3's most ambitious game



PS3 online report

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Okay, so you've read the mag and now we'd love to know what you think of it. Send your thoughts, criticisms, burning questions, requests for issue three and anything else, no matter how tenuously PlayStation-related, to opm@futurenet.co.uk. Chances are it'll end up in our issue three letters page. You can also contact us at Official PlayStation Magazine, Future Plc, 30 Monmouth Street, Bath BA1 2BW, UK.

Stuff we'd particularly like to hear about...

- What PS3 game are you most (and least) looking forward to?
- What was your most played game over Christmas?
- Which classic PS1 and PS2 games would you like us to revisit?
- Will you miss the rumble from your pad?

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who is...

Agent 47

#1
PLAYSTATION
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The lowdown on Hitman's killing clone

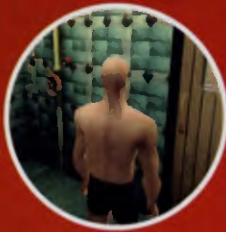
The perfect assassin, 47 is the result of years of research into cloning. His origins lie in the classified files of a top secret French Foreign Legion project: investigating the use of cloned body parts and tissue to repair injured soldiers. One scientist, Dr Ort-Meyer, continued the research illegally by selling life-extending, artificially grown organs to a criminal cabal in return for funding. Using gangster DNA, he eventually created perfect human clones. Ort-Meyer intended to produce a superhuman army, but let his best specimen escape when he realised his business partners were going to steal his life's work. Once free, 47 found work as a professional assassin. His first targets were the crime bosses responsible for his creation...

Cooler kills

Hitman: Codename 47
(PC, 2000)
Having tracked down Dr Ort-Meyer, Agent 47 machine-guns his way through dozens of identical clone 'brothers' to finally kill his creator, Very Freud.



Hitman: Contracts
(PS2, 2004)
47 kills a target with a weak heart by locking him in a sauna and turning the heat up. Hot, sweaty and freakling out, the mark eventually dies of a massive coronary.



Hitman 2: Silent Assassin
(PS2, 2002)
After sneaking into a restaurant kitchen, 47 offs a Japanese crime lord's son by serving him Fugu—a sushi delicacy that's lethal when incorrectly prepared.



Hitman: Blood Money
(PS2, 2006)
47 sabotages a pyrotechnics display at a nightclub, setting a female arms dealer alight and causing her to fall into a shark tank, below, where she's instantly devoured.



Best widowmakers



Silverballers
Modified, semi-automatic AMT Hardballers. The .45 calibre handgun provides optimum stopping power and is heavily customisable, with silencers, laser sights and fully automatic action.



Walther WA 2000 sniper rifle
Originally designed as a Special Ops police rifle, only 176 were made. The bullpup design, where the firing mechanism is mounted behind the trigger, maximises shooting accuracy.



Fibre Wire
The choice of the professional for 'close' work. Made of poly-carbon fibres it won't trigger metal detectors, or be felt during a body search. It also guarantees a silent kill as, when used correctly, it crushes the victim's larynx.

Hitman Trivia



David Bateson (the Carling ads) provides the voice and physical model for 47. He's expressed interest in the movie role and is backed by several fan petitions.

Agent 47's name comes from the number on his neck, 640509-040147 (the barcode was added later, when he was a teenager). It also refers to his 47th chromosome, one more than normal humans.



The ruthless hitman is fond of animals. As a child he adopted an escaped lab rabbit, and even held a funeral for it. More recently, he cried after being forced to kill his pet canary.



47's symbol, found on his pistols and briefcase, is a modified fleur-de-lys. It was originally the insignia of the French Foreign Legion's Special Projects department, before being adopted by Dr Ort-Meyer.



Hitman's haunted. Find room 106 in Contracts' mission traditions Of The Trade—it's in the closed-off wing of the hotel. You may see a ghostly figure in the corridor, but if not, take a good look in the bathroom mirror.



The International Contract Agency uses the motto 'Merces Letifer', which is Latin for 'Lethal Trade'. Identical to an old M15 emblem, it links Agent 47 to the Freemasons and the Danish Royal family.

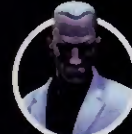
Supporting Cast



Dr Ort-Meyer
The scientist that created 47 from his and four other top criminals' DNA. All five met during service in the French Foreign Legion and, together, are 47's fathers.



Diana Burnwood
47's contact with his employers, the International Contract Agency. She gives him target details, and is the only other surviving Agency member. You never see her face.



Mark II and Mark III
Further cloning attempts have only produced Mark Purajah II and Mark Parchezzi III. Both worked for rival contract agency The Franchise and were killed by 47. Of course.



Agent Smith
An inept CIA agent with links to the Agency. In every Hitman game he has been found in his boxers, having been caught and tortured. 47 always rescues him, often resentfully.



Alexander Leland Cayne
Former FBI head who ran The Franchise. He wanted 47 destroyed to prevent other countries from using his DNA. He's killed by 47 when the Hitman rises at his own funeral.

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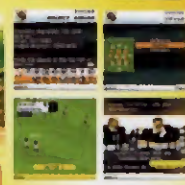
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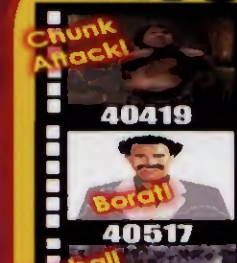
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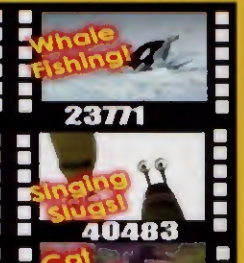


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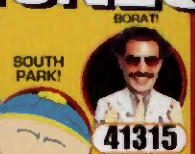
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